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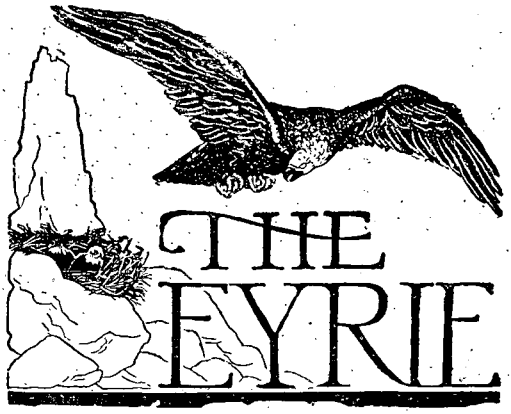

WHEN we read manuscripts for WEIRD TALES—and there are a lot of them coming in day after day, post after post—we sort of "savor" many of them before we settle down to read them. Sometimes the savor lasts (sometimes it doesn't; that's a different story) and it's always a red letter day for us when a story by an author unknown to us, first arouses our interest and then holds it as we get deeper into it.

The first story by Suzanne Pickett that crossed our desk caught our eye, and we have seldom been disappointed since. In connection with her intriguing "Effie's Pets" in this issue Mrs. Pickett tells us:

As for myself, I am married, and my husband is Safety Director for Black Diamond Coal Mining Co., of Birmingham, Alabama. When he started working for them as Superintendent of their West Blocton mine in '42, he was the youngest Sup't in Alabama at that time. We have two daughters and two grandchildren.

My first story was published at about age ten in the children's page of the Birmingham News, my second in a series in the Birmingham Post at age fifteen. But my talents were supposed to be music and painting, so I thought very little of writing, only had the urge to 'dash off' a story every five years or so. I write songs (naturally) poetry, etc.

At twenty-four I wrote the News in Rhyme for the Welch Daily News of Welch, W. Va.—Will Rogers and I were featured on the front page—but I was still going to be a great artist or musician, only I was so busy with my children I had little time. (Oh yes, I also go in for amateur dramatics etc. Jack of all trades and—well I hope to be good at writing some day.)

Four years ago the urge to write became so strong that I at last started working seriously, I have written and burned one novel and a half. Have three more al-

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Weird Tales

January 1954

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COVER BY W. H. SILVEY

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

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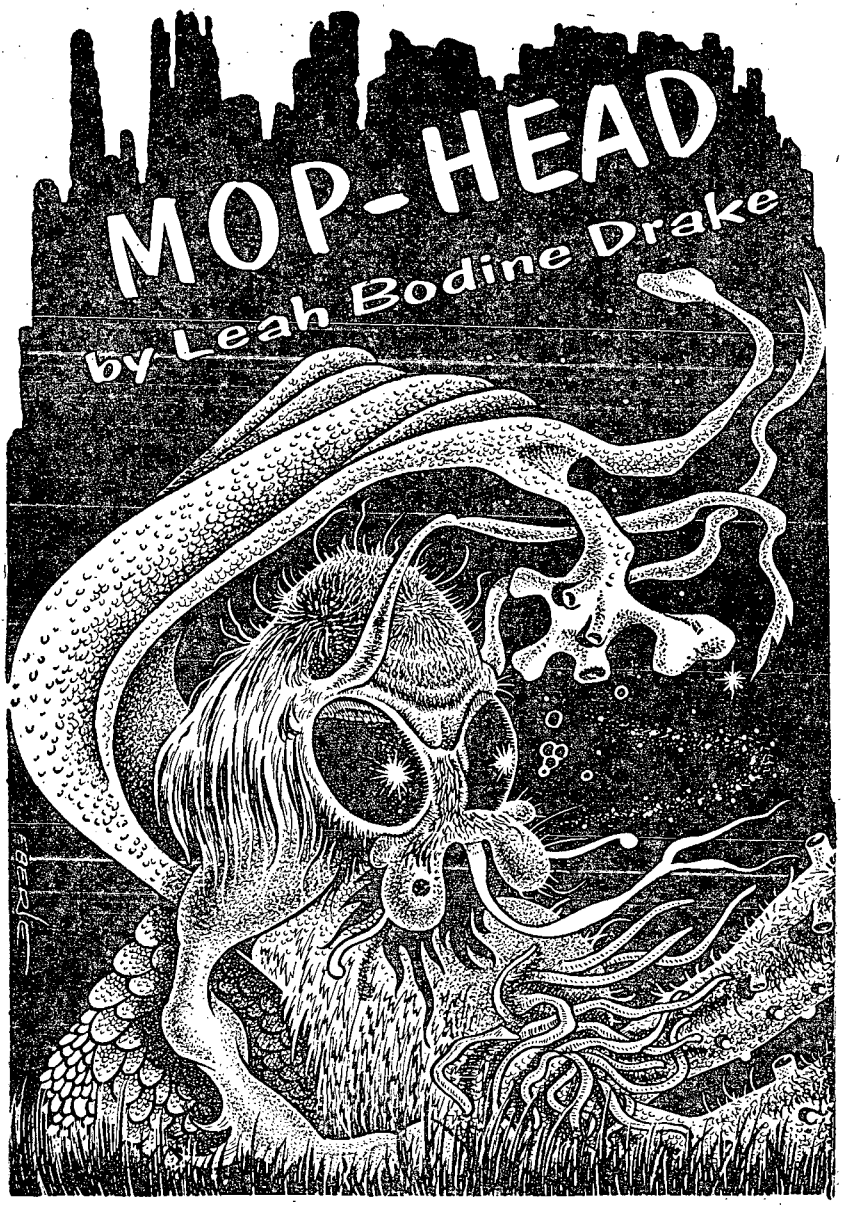

Heading by Joseph Eberle

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. . . along the countryside, from yard to yard, from farm to farm dogs set up a barking.

IN ABANDONED cisterns and old wells, in moldy heaps of straw forgotten in the corners of deserted barns, in reedy pools deep in the woods, in fungied hollows of dead trees, in all such secret places apart from man, strange life engenders, drifts in and takes root and form.

In a place called Yancey's Meadow such a thing grew and waxed and made itself a shape, listened and dozed and waited.

"Dorothy, where are you and Harry Todd going?"

"Just over the Yancey's Meadow to play, Mrs. Trevyllian."

"Not Mrs. Trevyllian, honey —*mother.*"

"Yes . . . mother."

"Well, don't you all stay long. Daddy'll be home from Court early today."

"Yes'm . . . *mother.*"

Oh, dear, thought Aline Loveless, will I ever make a dent in that child's affections? Won't she ever forget that I was Mrs. Trevyllian and not her natural-born mother? Little Harry Todd accepts me—at least, he tolerates me. But Dorothy, no.

The stout, pretty red-haired woman watched the two little figures, seven-year-old girl and five-year-old brother, as they moved off towards the fields that lay close by, for the home of Jeff Loveless stood on the edge of the small county seat of Elkford.

I declare, she thought bitterly, if I'd known what a chore it

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would turn out to be, trying to mother a dead woman's children, I might have thought twice about leaving Bardstown to marry Jeff! That's a fine way for a little girl to address her mother—"Mrs. Trevyllian"—all right, *"step-mother"!* But even Harry Todd says, "Aline." Why doesn't Dorothy go one step more and call me the Widow Trevyllian?

Six months ago Aline had married the lonely young lawyer with the two motherless children, and for six months she had tried, with all her store of natural warmth and kindness, to take the dead Reba's place. She knew she had succeeded with Jeff, and to a degree with his little son. But with the girl she had failed. The child seemed almost to hate her. Nobody had ever hated Aline in her life and the tears welled as she gave rein to her thoughts. The stitches in the apron she was hemming grew dim and she threw down her work with disgust.

"I'm such a softie!" she said aloud, and bent down to lift Mudge to her lap.

Mudge, a chunky Maltese, was the last living link with her former life, and the feel of the heavy little body gave her comfort. "Mudge loves me, at any rate—don't you, fellow?" she muttered to the purring cat as she rocked in the well-worn chair in the dining-room's bay window. "I reckon I shouldn't even sit here, in Reba's chair, if Dorothy had her way."

THE noise of hoofs and a rattling wagon coming to a halt at the back gate made Aline wipe her eyes hastily, and by the time a discreet knock sounded on the boards of the kitchen steps, country fashion, she was once more to all appearances her happy, pleasant self. The knock was followed by a rich baritone calling softly, "Miz Loveless? Ah's heah with de fryahs."

"Oh, it's you, Ben! Come in," and Aline moved to open the kitchen door. Ben Pondy, the colored man who owned a small farm on the outskirts of town had brought in his weekly order of frying chickens.

"What nice, fat hens you raise, Ben," she said as she took the two limp bodies and rummaged in the broken teapot for change.

"Yes'm, thank you, ma'm." The old man took the money but lingered.

"What is it, Ben?"

"Well'm, Miz Loveless, Ah don't want you to figger Ah'm buttin' in wheah ain't got no call to—but them two li'l chilluns of Mistah Jeff's—they shouldn't be out yondah in that theah field so much. No'm."

"You mean somebody keeps a

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bull over there? My goodness, Ben, I'm glad you told me!"

"Well, no'm . . . not 'xactly bull. But they's that ol' well in de field yondah. Ol' dried-up well wheah they ain't been no house for de Lawd know *how* long."

"Of course they shouldn't play near a well!" cried Aline. "Why, they might fall in! I'll see that they stay away from there from now on."

"Yes'm . . . 'Course, they *might* fall in, though it done got coupla planks laid 'cross it. But Miz Loveless ma'm, it's kind of a funny place, that Yancey's field. Ah come by theah once, right smack in de middle of de evening, sun shinin' with all his might, ever' thing nice and peaceful, and Ah heah a noise like somebody chucklin' and a-whistlin' to hisself over by that ol' well. Man, Ah never *did* stop to heah no more! An' Ah ain't never go through that field again—no *ma'm!*"

"How queer! Do you reckon there might be snakes there?" Aline was half alarmed, half amused at the old man's tale. "I'm grateful to you for telling me, Ben."

"Yes'm. Sho' wouldn't want nothin' to happen to Mistah Jeff's and Miss Reba's chillun. Sho' wouldn't go theah my own self."

AS SHE heard the clatter and clop of Pondy's decrepit outfit move away Aline took a yard-rake and went across the narrow lane into Yancey's Meadow. The sun was hot and the strong musty smell of drying grasses filled the August air. Funny, she thought, ever since I've lived in Elkford I can't remember ever seeing any people in this field, not even any cows. Nobody ever seems to come here except Jeff's young ones.

She trudged across the meadow, her short sturdy young body plowing through the long johnson - grass. Jimsonweeds caught at her skirt and stick-tights to her stockings. Grasshoppers leaped up in alarm as she brushed by their green hidey-holes. A faint breeze wandering aimlessly towards her brought the sound of children's voices talking excitedly and, she thought, a little stealthily. There seemed to be a third voice, with something thick and unnatural about it. It was vaguely unpleasant, she thought.

She could see no one. The insects whirred, joe pye-weed nodded its purpling plumes, the sun beat down. A quick little chill ran over Aline. "Dorothy! Harry Todd!" she called, her voice skittering away across the field like a scared rabbit.

Some way off, where there had been no one, the heads of the two children suddenly popped up from the grass. As they

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got to their feet the little girl had a sullen look on her pretty face, and the boy looked frightened. They came slowly towards Aline, and she said sharply, "What were you two doing near that old well?" For now as she moved forward she could see the dark opening in the long weeds, the ancient gray boards that covered it haphazardly pushed aside.

THERE was a moment of silence, then Dorothy said, looking anywhere but at her stepmother, "We were just fool-in' round. Just sorta walkin' by."

"Walking by? But I couldn't see you—you must have been leaning right over it! Don't you know that you might have fallen in? Dorothy, you ought to look after your little brother better than this!"

As neither answered her, Aline's impatience, always near the surface, got the best of her. "What on earth do you two find so fascinating, anyway, about this place? You and Harry Todd have been kitin' off here all summer! And Ben Pondy thinks there's snakes around."

"Ben Pondy!" Dorothy looked at her stepmother, suddenly scornful. "That ol' cowardly custand! That ol' scairdy-cat! Ain't any snakes in that well."

"Well, you might fall in. . . . And who were you talking to? I'm sure I heard three voices."

Dorothy hesitated, then she replied, "Nobody. Nobody at all."

"Wasn't nobody, Aline," Harry Todd's treble piped up brightly. "Just ol' Mop-Head. He talks to us all the time and—*ouch!*"

"Why, Dorothy Loveless, you kicked your brother!" Aline, shocked, stooped to comfort the boy whose small shin had been given a surrepitious warning by his sister. "And you *were* talking to someone," she went on. "I heard you, and Harry Todd just said so. Who's Old Mop-Head, and why do you tell me stories?"

"He's just somebody we made up, Mrs. Trevyllian. He's just a play - somebody, honest — mother."

Her manner changed. She was all smiles and sweetness as she took her stepmother's hand.

"Harry Todd and I just stopped to peek down that ol' well for a teeny weeny little ol' second — didn't we, Harry Todd?"

"Uh-huh, I reckon so," mumbled the boy as he took Aline's other hand. As the trio moved off towards home the little girl looked up sideways at Aline in an appealing way she had, and said, "Now that Queen Esther's got the misery again and can't come around tonight, can I wipe the dishes for you, mother?"

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To have you call me mother, Aline thought, I'd let you break every one of them, including my big Spode platter. Aloud she said, "Certainly, honey, that'll be a help."

AS THE little party entered the back yard Jeff's car turned into the drive. Not even the fact that the two children tore their hands from hers to fling themselves on their father, leaving her for a moment outside the family group, could spoil her happy mood that the feel of those small hands had induced. Even Ben Pondy's warnings dimmed in the sudden rush of well-being.

This pleasant state lasted through a hilarious if rather scrappy supper, result of the absence of the imperious Queen Esther whose reign in the Loveless kitchen was frequently interrupted by her "misery in de back." Not until brother and sister were in bed (after a washing-up marked by only one broken cup) and Aline was sitting with Jeff on the screened-in side porch, did she remember Ben's story about Yancey's Meadow.

"Jeff, do you know anything about an old well over there in that field—the one they call Yancey's Meadow?"

"What, honey?" He lifted his head from the radio's glowing dials. "Oh, that place. Yes, there's a well there. Been there since the Year One. Why?"

"The children have taken to playing there all the time, and I'm afraid they may fall in, or get bitten by a snake, or something. Ben Pondy hinted they might, when he brought the fryers today. He said he wouldn't go through that field himself for love or money. What's wrong with it, Jeff? Outside of snakes, I mean?"

Jeff studied his pipe a moment. "I don't rightly know, Aline," he said slowly. "I never much liked to go through that field as a kid, but I couldn't have told you why. That well's been boarded over, though, as long as I remember."

He stopped to light up. "Tom Bell tried to pasture some horses there once, but they got skittish about something, and one jumped the fence and took off for the woods, and it was two days before they found her. Funny. . . .

"Well, I want you to forbid them playing there, dear. And Jeff, do you know anybody named Mop-Head? The children seem to know somebody by that name. I never heard of 'em."

"Mop-Head?" laughed Jeff. "I should hope not! What a handle! There's some Moreheads, live up by Tyewhoppety, but that's a sight too far for their kids to

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come down here visiting of an evening. But about that well—I'll tell the little huzzybugs to stay away from it."

THE radio crackled and sang, the smoke from the pipe mingled with the cloying scent of clematis in the warm Kentucky night. Where the street straggled off into the fields a lonely arc-light swung, its pale glow like a guardian posted against all things that crept or padded or cried in the rustling woods and ferny hollows, and were not of man. And off in its own place, amid the scummy water and crumbling stones, the dead leaves and moldering bones of field-mice, the thing called Mop-Head was awake, ears up in the quiet.

And the children, awake in their beds, watched a yellow half-moon sail up from the dark woods and send a long ray across the floor. The house was still. The big folks had gone to bed. A whispering began: "Harry Todd, you awake?" "Uh-huh." "Well, get up! We gotta go to the field. We promised ol' Mop-Head."

"I'm scared. He's ugly. He's uglier'n a scarecrow."

"I know—but he's our friend, and he'll do what we want about—*you* know—if we get him things. He promised us, that time we woke him up. He can't do everything by himself—he *told* us that! Hurry up!"

Quietly, as if with much practice, the two children got out of bed and stole downstairs to the dark kitchen. The girl took a large covered plate from the refrigerator, and as carefully as two little animals on the prowl, brother and sister left the house and headed for Yancey's Meadow. Through the milky river-mist that lay in long veils over the grass, they went straight to the well in the far corner. Pulling and tugging, they removed the rotting planks to one side, and tipped over the plate's contents into the darkly gleaming depths.

A wind ruffled the fair hair of the two young heads. A hunting owl called from the hedge, and a fox, passing on some private business of his own, stopped and lifted a startled paw. And that which lived and had its curious being in the well chuckled with pleasure, and all its small mouths slobbered as it noisily feasted.

WHEN Aline discovered her loss next morning she was only annoyed and puzzled at first.

"Who took those chickens out of the ice-box?" she asked at breakfast.

"Not guilty. Don't look at me!" said Jeff, busy with ham and eggs.

"Well, somebody did. Those

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hens couldn't walk off by themselves. And Queen Esther hasn't been here for almost a week—and I doubt if even she would make off with two whole dressed chickens, although I'm well aware of her small-scale pilfering from the larder." Aline turned to the children. "Do you youngsters know anything about it?"

Downcast eyes and absorption in their breakfast of brother and sister told the young woman that she was getting warm. "Come to think of it," she went on, "seems like a lot of food has been disappearing around here lately. Half a coconut cake that vanished over night—just like those fryers—and other things. Come on, kids, 'fess up. Which one did it, and what for?"

"Didn't take 'em," muttered the girl, while the little boy buried his nose still deeper in his milk mug.

"I'm sorry to say this—but, Dorothy, I don't believe you," said Aline, hoping desperately that she didn't sound like the mean stepmother of fiction. Her fear was realized as her husband said quickly, "Oh, come now, Aline! If Dolly says she didn't take them, I'm sure she didn't. Dolly, baby, speak up and tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you Moses."

Harry Todd laughed, but his sister burst into tears. Jumping from the chair she ran to her father and clung to him, sobbing, "I didn't, I didn't, I didn't! Oh, Daddy, I want Mommy! I want my *real* Mommy!"

Jeff Loveless turned worried eyes to his wife. "Don't you reckon some tramp may have stolen those hens? What would Doll here want with them, anyway? Tell you what," he added, "I'll go by Pondy's and have him bring you two more. O.K.?"

"Oh, all right," Aline agreed weakly, angry at herself for letting the matter drop so casually. Her thoughts were far from happy as she saw Jeff off to his law-office and heard his last orders to the children to "stay out of Yancey's Meadow." Dispiritedly she turned to the usual chores of the day.

OUTSIDE, under the big sycamore Dorothy pushed her brother back and forth in the swing and whispered fiercely, "Old Mop-Head doesn't want any more dead stuff. He wants somethin' alive next time, he said. Then pretty soon he'll get strong and powerful and can give us our wish . . . *you* know what."

"Ain't got any live stuff," said the boy.

"Well, then we'll have to find some. That's what *he* wants . . . and you want Mommy back, don't you?"

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"Mommy's dead. They put her in a box," he answered, swinging himself vigorously.

"Silly! I know *that,* Harry Todd Loveless! But Mop-Head can get her back, like we asked him, and then that Mrs. Trevyllian, that ol' red-headed woman, will have to go home."

Her young mind scurried about the house and yard like an invisible mouse, considering all the prospects of living food for their peculiar friend. . . . He had said if he had live food he could bring Mommy back. . . . She tiptoed to the side porch. Mudge was busily washing himself on the step.

When the potato sack swooped down over him the big Maltese was so taken by surprise that neither clawing nor writhing helped him. With the spitting, moving sack bumping along between them, his captors hurried over to the forbidden field. They pulled aside the boards and looked down. Something glistened a little far below. Dorothy set the sack on the well's lip and pushed it over.

"Yoo-hoo!" she called softly. Mudge made a fine splash.

THE sun shone and westerned. Insects hummed and churred in the warm grass. The shadows lengthened and dusk fell on trees and vines and hedges. Bats stole out of their secret places and field-mice ran through their tiny alleys in the weeds. And that which was at the bottom of the well in the meadow felt strong currents pass through its crazy veins, felt the living blood it had tasted nourish the rackety body.

The thing called Mop-Head was not animal or plant or rock, although, by now, it was a little of each. It had no definite body, and it longed for one. A scrap of elemental force that had drifted down over the field from far-off places, and settled long ago in the forgotten well, it had gradually built itself a body and a consciousness over the years. From darkness and silence and damp, out of earth-mold and wet leaves and blown dandelions, of scum and spiders' legs and ants' mandibles and the brittle bones of moles it formed a shape and a sentience. From the thin laughter of children and the far calls of men, from the haunting songs that the winds blew towards its from the Negro church in the woods, from fox's bark and owl's cry and rain's patter, the creature had made itself a clumsy mockery of speech.

It was not good, not evil, and it had one desire: to acquire a solid body. Being an elemental, it had vigor far beyond its size. Now that it had eaten, it felt strong, capable of anything. It clambered up the sides of the well and slipped over. The rising

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moon glistened on its fuzzy gray ness, glittered in its many eyes. Its antenna waved in the warm air and the thing whimpered a little. And in Ben Pondy's henhouse the hens awoke and protested against the strangeness in the air, and along the countryside, from yard to yard and from farm to farm, the dogs set up a barking.

The thing gathered its gimcrack body together and its feelers tested the wind. Finding the direction it wanted, it stood rigid a moment. Then it wobbled off toward the town. And the dogs barked at its passing, telling their masters of what was abroad in the night, and their masters slept.

AS THE Loveless family sat at lunch the next day Jeff talking gaily of a case he had handled that morning, Ben Pondy's old horse came down the alley at a clattering pace and stopped at the gate.

"Mistah Jeff! Mistah Jeff!" The colored man came in the yard at a run. "Come heah quick!"

When the young lawyer let him in the old man grabbed his arm and clung to it, moaning, "Oh, Mistah Jeff, suh! Somebody been at Mizz Reba's grave and mess it all up!"

"In Heaven's name, Ben, what are you talking about? Talk sense!"

"Yessuh, am talkin' sense. Somebody got into you all's lot in the grave yard and dig up Miss Reba. I come by theah jest now, and de grave all open, an' —" He groaned again and clung tighter to the other's arm. "Oh, Mistah Jeff, somebody break open that theah coffin and done stole Miss Reba!"

Drawn by the uproar, Aline and the children stood in an amazed group on the steps. Harry Todd started to cry, but Dorothy, her hands pressed tightly together, grew stiff with some inward emotion. Jeff, without a word and not even stopping to get his car, ran to Ben's wagon. With its owner scrambling up beside him, he sent the ancient horse to a feeble gallop in the direction of the cemetery.

Left alone, Aline felt she couldn't sit home and puzzle herself over the outrageous news. A heavy feeling of unease invaded her. Old Miss Crittenden was a near neighbor, and the young woman decided she wanted the companionship of someone besides the strangely excited children.

"Wash your hands, babies, we'll go over to Miss Sarah's a while."

"Isn't Mommy in that ol' box any more?" asked Harry Todd brightly.

"Hush, sugar—don't talk about it. Your Mommy's in

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Heaven," said Aline. But she thought she heard Dorothy say to her brother in a low tone, "Mommy'll be back," although such a remark certainly made no sense!

As they passed the side steps she wondered where Mudge was. Her pet hadn't shown up for his usual breakfast of fish-heads. Probably out on the tiles last night and hasn't gotten home yet, she decided with a slight smile.

IT WAS a far from smiling group of men who assembled later at the Loveless family plot in the cemetery. Before the incredulous eyes of Jeff, Sheriff Helm and the posse which the latter had hastily gotten together, the grave of the first Mrs. Loveless lay open. The earth was thrown up as if a huge mole had burrowed under it, and the wooden casket, its lid ripped open, and with long scratches on its polished surface, was exposed. Except for the stained silk of the lining, still pitifully impressed with the dead woman's shape, the casket was empty.

Who had taken Reba Loveless from her grave, and why? As the news went around, and the baffled posse explored cellars and alleys and the nearby woods, the question was on every tongue in Elkford. Nobody reported having seen any strangers in town, and there hadn't been a tramp lying-up in a culvert for weeks. And nobody in these parts had any rhyme or reason to do such a thing! By twilight, Sheriff Helm owned himself stumped, and declared it a day until other plans could be made.

"I'll run you home, Jeff," said Deputy Joe Barndollar as the weary men straggled back, in threes and fours, to the courthouse. "We'll start out again tonight, if you say so, but you ought to get something to eat first."

"Eat! . . . Hell, Joe, I can't eat anything! But thanks for the lift—guess I *will* go home for a while," Jeff said in a tight voice, groaning inwardly. My God, who can have done this to poor Reba? He longed suddenly for Aline's calm good sense and practical, affectionate concern.

Aline herself was feeling anything but calm or sensible. Miss Sarah had a taste in conversation for rather grisly gossip and speculations. Then, as the word spread from the old lady to her many acquaintances via the phone, with the circle widening as they passed the news along, the jangling of that instrument got to be more than Aline could bear. Several calls to the Sheriff's office had brought no fresh word, and as the afternoon wore on she felt that she'd be better off

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at home. If Jeff came back he'd be tired and unhappy. Yes, she'd much better go home.

"But I'll leave the children here, if you don't mind," she told Miss Sarah as she prepared to leave. "I don't want them to hear about that grave and Jeff's bound to talk about it."

Old Miss Crittenden was delighted to have company for supper and pressed Aline to stay, too. "You don't want to be in that house alone with Jeff gone, and all the menfolks off in the woods and all," protested the old lady. "Anybody who'd make off with a dead woman must be a nasty kind of crook, and there's no telling what he'd do to a *live* one."

BUT Aline had made up her mind to be home when Jeff returned. As she went into the empty street she was surprised to see how far the sun had westered. It's later than I knew, she mused, glancing towards Yancey's Meadow, which was a glory of golden light. For a minute she thought she saw a figure coming across the field towards her, dark against the sunset. It moved quickly, and there was something odd about it. But the light was in her eyes and she could not see it distinctly. By the time she had walked the short way up the street to her house and turned into the driveway she'd forgotten it.

The clematis vines made an early dusk on the screened-in

porch and the air was growing cool. She shivered a little, and as she entered the house she heard the back gate click. She thought the children must have come home after all. Then a foul smell, unbearably rank and

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loathsome, assailed her. Rapid, shuffling footsteps sounded on the kitchen floor and a shadow darkened the doorway. Aline looked up . . . and screamed, and screamed again at what she saw before her.

In its most recent dress, Mop-Head was there.

It leaped towards her, thin arms wound themselves around her neck and pressed. Her senses reeled as she fought the thing with every ounce of strength in her short, solid young body, while the filthy odor sickened her and the wild horror of it dazed her mind. The pressure on her throat grew harder, waves of pain rolled over her, until one wave, more powerful than the rest, swallowed her up in merciful unconsciousness, and she fell heavily to the floor.

Through the still evening air, down the shady street went a peculiar whistling call. The horses in Tom Bell's stable heard it and whinnied. The town dogs heard it and challenged it fiercely. The Loveless children, playing on the Crittenden veranda, heard it and knew what it was. They looked at each other, and Dorothy said excitedly, "Mop-Head's awake! Come on, Harry Todd, let's go find Mommy!"

The sun was sinking behind the sycamores as the boy and girl ran down the street towards home. A car passed them, and the little boy cried, "There's Daddy!"

Joe Barndollar slowed down and the children piled in, Dorothy crying happily, "Daddy, we're going to see Mommy pretty soon! Our real Mommy, I mean!"

"What? . . . Good Lord, no, baby!" said her father, horrified.

"Yes, we will—somebody we know is going to bring her back to us—from Heaven, I reckon. He *promised* us!"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Doll," said poor Jeff wearily. "Come in, Joe, I'll ask Aline to fix you a bite to eat. I just want some coffee, my own self."

AS THE car slowed down in the driveway a repulsive odor met them. Could Aline have left a gas-jet on? Jeff wondered, although it smelled a lot worse than gas. There was no light in the house, but they could see somebody sitting in the rocking-chair by the bay window.

"Look! Look! There's Mommy!" cried Harry Todd, pointing.

Dorothy leaped from the car and tore into the house. The men heard her give a curious gasp and then a strangled cry. They raced in after her, to stumble over the unconscious body of Jeff's wife on the floor.

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But it wasn't this that made them fall back, holding their arms over their eyes to shut out the horror that met them.

From the rocking-chair in the bay window a figure rose to confront them in the twilight. With rotten silk crumbling away from the yellow flesh, with soil and twigs fouling the long, fair hair, with dead eyes upon them in an unseeing stare and dead lips smiling in terrible mockery of life, the body of Reba Loveless tottered towards them. The shredding arms stretched towards Dorothy and the gray mouth opened.

"Here I am!" said Reba.

With a sob of terror Jeff sprang forward to sweep the little girl out of the creature's reach. As he caught her to him, Joe Barndollar took one look at that shape, drew his gun and emptied its barrel in its chest.

A tremor passed over Reba's body. For one moment longer it stood erect. Then the parody of what had been Reba Loveless collapsed in a heap of decaying flesh and bones. As it fell, Barndollar thought he saw something run out of the dead mouth—"like a big curly-haired mole, or a kind of shaggy spider," as he described it later. It was making a chuckling noise as it scuttled across the floor and out the door into the warm darkness. Joe hurled his empty gun after it, but missed. He dashed out after it, only to see it disappear in the grass. Although there was a rustling in the mock-orange hedge that bordered Yancey's Meadow, he could see nothing.

The body of Jeff's first wife lay where it had fallen, in a gruesome little pile. The imitation life that had supported it briefly, that had raised it from the grave and had kept it hidden in the abandoned well until its moment had come to present itself to Dorothy—that life had gone with its alien guest.

BUT Aline's still-living body moved feebly, and Jeff was down on his knees, his brain whirling while his hands helped her to sit up. Her hands moved feebly at her mauled throat. As remembrance of the horror flooded back she began to cry silently, with long shuddering sobs. Then she saw Dorothy.

Her step-daughter stood like a small statue, her eyes round with fright, but no sound, other than that first faint gasp, had come from her.

"Dorothy . . . Harry Todd?" Aline managed to say.

"They're all right, Darling—don't try to talk," Jeff cried, while the boy threw himself upon her, sobbing, "Don't die, Aline! Don't die!"

Aline still looked at the little

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girl. She had such a queer, frozen appearance. . . .

"Dorothy?" she said again.

Dorothy wanted to answer, wanted to cry out as her brother had, "Don't die, Aline — Mother!" She wanted to say many things to the woman she had resented for so long—like, "I know I was bad . . . I wanted you to go away and for Mommy to come back . . . but I didn't want all *this!* I didn't want Mommy like *that* . . . and I'm sorry for what I did to Mudge . . . and oh, Mother, I'm scared! I'm scared!"

But nothing of this would come out. Her throat felt funny and she couldn't make the words sound like they ought to—only a kind of choked gurgle.

Jeff's jaw dropped. "My God, she can't talk! Aline! Dolly—she can't *talk!* Oh, my poor baby!" And Jeff suddenly knew that the horror had been too much for one small girl to face, as she had, alone, in a dark room, and that it had struck her dumb.

Yet, as the deputy dialed Doctor Oldham with a shaking hand, a faint, half-bitter hope crept into Aline's mind. She'll need me now, she thought. Until the fountains of her speech can be unlocked again, Dolly will need me now.

FARTHER and farther away, over the darkling fields in and out among the misty trees, along the reedy banks of creeks and down into damp hollows, the thing which the children had called Old Mop-Head hurried and danced and tumbled.

It felt light and gay, but its strength was fading. The fierce but transient power which had filled its makeshift body, which had spurred it to burrow and rip and choke and reanimate was leaving it. Its essential being had not been harmed by the bullets, but its ramshackle body was coming apart. Here fell away a giant mandible, there a long shred of borrowed 'possum- fur, there again a beetle's wing and a spider's leg. It was getting sleepy, too. It wanted to find a place that was deep and dark and hidden, and wet with an ancient wetness, where it could rest until it had assembled a new shape. This world it had stumbled into had all sorts of exciting possibilities, all kinds of shapes, and materials for shapes, and other beings to talk to and do things for and make friends of!

But right now all it wanted was to sleep and sleep. . . .

It began to look about for a forgotten cistern or an old well.

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by Suzanne Pickett

EFFIE'S PETS

. . . the two ghosts fought savagely.

WE LISTENED to ghost tales at night and hunted all day.

Funny thing, too, these people seemed literally to believe in their ghosts, and acted queer about my hunting. "Better stick with Rafe," they'd say as soon as they learned that I had come down from Detroit to hunt in these Alabama back woods.

"Why?" I wanted to know. But I never got a satisfactory answer.

A friend from the South told me these woods were full of wild turkeys; I had some business in Birmingham in late November, so I took an extra week for hunting. Rafe Hogan, the best hunter in the country accompanied me, but so far we hadn't even seen a turkey.

"I ain't never had such luck." Rafe leaned his gun against a persimmon tree, tore a hunk from a plug of tobacco with his yellow teeth and began to devour it. At least he seemed to be eating as

Heading by W. H. Silvey

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he spat streams of amber against a sumach bush.

"That looks like good hunting." I pointed to an area thickly overgrown with timber. "Plenty of squirrels there, anyhow." I could see them running along the ground under the trees. First game I had seen at all. And these looked quite tame. "Bet there are turkeys too."

Rafe twisted his head and stared at me. Something about his face reminded me of a turkey. It was red, with a beak of a nose above a long neck. "I don't hunt there," he said and his face darkened, seemed almost frightened.

"Why?" I laughed.

"Just don't." He spat another stream of amber, took out his knife and began to pare his nails.

"Time you started then." I said. "Come on."

"I ain't goin'," Rafe's voice rose stubbornly.

"I'm paying you to guide me and I want a turkey," I said angrily. "Bound to be some in that timber."

"Well, I ain't goin' there," he said stubbornly.

All at once I wanted to laugh. He was so much like a child, you couldn't stay mad at him. "Why, Rafe?" I asked.

"Just ain't goin'." He chewed some more, scratched his ear and spat again.

"It's not posted," I said.

"Don't need to be. Nobody round here goin' to hunt there."

"You sound like the place was haunted or something," I was still laughing.

He stuck his nose in the air but didn't speak.

"Who lives there?" I asked.

"Nobody livin' there now."

"Well, who did then, murderers or something?"

"Old Jock Davis and his sister Effie."

"Bad folks? That why you're scared?"

"Didn't say I was scared."

"Then it's Jock and Effie. Didn't you like them?"

"Liked 'em all right. Me and Jock's hunted many a night through these woods. Had the best pack of dogs in the country."

"Think Jock wouldn't like your hunting?" I was getting impatient.

"Him. Naw. Jock'd be glad to see me."

"Then why in—" I checked myself, and said evenly. "Enough of this foolishness. I'm going to find at least one turkey before I go back to Detroit."

"Better find him somewhere else."

"Where then?"

Rafe scratched his head again. "Danged if I know," he said.

I STARTED towards the Davis place. "Going with me?" I asked.

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"Nope." He leaned stubbornly against his tree.

"Well, I'll see you tonight." I said just as stubbornly.

"Hope so."

"Rafe," in exasperation, "I didn't think YOU would be so superstitious."

"Ain't superstition."

"Of all the—"

"You WILL go?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Well, remember, I warned you." He spat his cud of tobacco to the ground, took his knife and began to pick his teeth.

"I won't forget," I said sarcastically and started off. I wanted to take a switch to him as you would to a stubborn child.

"Dugan!" Rafe called as I neared the worn, rail fence.

"Yes?" I stopped, hoping he had changed his mind.

"If you need any help any time, just call Jock."

I snorted, walked up to the fence, jumped over it and was in the forbidden place.

Late that afternoon, I stopped to rest and eat my lunch. Three turkey toms and six squirrels were a good sized load. I could have killed at least six more. I had never seen so much wild game in any one place. They seemed to feel that no one would bother them there and were almost tame.

Oscar, Grady and the boys would never believe me when I told them. I wished now that I had brought a camera.

Squirrels played all around me as I ate. A row of turkeys topped the hill and walked slowly by. I couldn't resist them and raised my gun to shoot. Something pushed it to the earth and I could have sworn that I heard a gruff, but definitely feminine voice say: "You ain't goin' to kill no more."

Startled, I looked around, then grinned ruefully. Rafe had got ME to thinking things. But the turkeys were out of sight, so I finished my sandwich, cupped my hands and drank from the clear, cool spring that ran from under a rock. Then I picked up my game and started back the way I came.

There was the same rail fence. There was the sapling I had broken as I jumped it. I reached my hand towards the rail, but something, some invisible force, stopped me as suddenly as if I had run into a wall.

I tried to laugh again and pushed at the "thing" that held me back from the fence, but it could not be moved, I could tell

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now. It was another fence: made of logs, like an old fort or a log house. "This is carrying imagination too far!" I said. But still I couldn't move forward.

Terror gripped me for an instant, but I stepped back and it was as before. Nothing hindered me and there was nothing visible to hinder me. I walked parallel to the rail fence and started to jump over it.

I thought for a minute I had cracked my head, it hurt so bad. I lay on the earth stunned then stood up and moved back. "This is silly!" I remarked angrily. I would show them. There MUST be an opening somewhere.

AFTER reading of the fifty thousand acre ranches of the West, forty acres seems just a dot of land. But have you ever walked around forty acres? Between one sentence and the next you can cover a quarter of a mile in a car. But try walking it! It seems over a mile.

Then there's four quarters to surround a forty acre tract. Just one mile altogether. But with three turkeys, six squirrels and an invisible fence pushing against you— Well, I circled the thing three times. The third time I was so tired, so scared from running— Yes, I was running now, but doggedly I held on to the game. I'd show them. I'd SHOW them. If they didn't want me to have it, why had they let me kill it?

"Who are you?" I called suddenly. "What do you want? Why can't I get out of this danged place?" I had never used the word before, but it came naturally after a week with Rafe.

Suddenly, a little thin, wrinkled woman with dirty, gray hair straggling about her face from a knot at the back of her head, appeared. Her dress was incredibly dirty, her fingernails hooked, with a black, half moon under each of them.

Her eyes were gray too, and they seemed friendly. "You're home folks ain't you?" she asked. It must have been the word "danged," that I used to make her think that. "You orter know then," she said.

"Know what?" I asked crossly. This creature wouldn't hurt a fly.

But her face grew angry and her eyes danced as she snatched the squirrels from me and cuddled them in her arms. "Pets," she said. "Nothin' but pets. Ain't goin' to have 'em." She looked stubbornly at me. "Ain't nobody goin' to git no more. Kill my pets will you? I'll show you!"

She stroked the fur of a red squirrel. "We'll show 'em, won't we honey? Dance for Effie, play with me."

A horrible thought struck me. This woman is crazy. I am fenced

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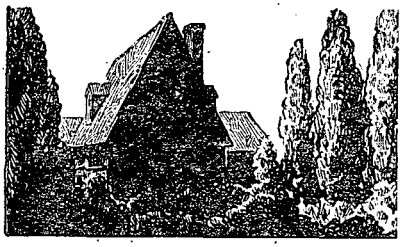
in with a mad woman. Then the full horror of the thing came upon me. *I* was the one who was mad. There was no visible wall, yet I was so mad I believed it was there.

I hope I never feel the terror, the helplessness of the next few minutes as I contemplated the awful thing that had happened to me; the loss of my mind.

"I didn't know," I said hopelessly. "I didn't know that the insane person KNEW he was mad. This was torture beyond bearing. I always thought he believed everyone else was crazy, and he the only sane person in the universe."



Yet the woman WAS real. She stood before me in her anger. I couldn't imagine the ring of filth under her fingernails. This was NOT fantasy. NOT a shimmering dream. And perhaps not—not insanity on my part.

The woman was TOO real. Her image didn't vary, only as anger came and went in her face. Her wrinkles were natural, her straggling hair. There was nothing distorted as in a dream or fantasy.

Comforted at last, I thought, poor creature. SHE it is who is mad. I must placate her then go back to Rafe's house. I laughed aloud in happiness at this assurance of my own sanity. OF COURSE I was sane. The very thought, the very idea in my own mind of this thing had proved my sanity.

Crazy people DIDN'T know it. I had personally learned that when my cousin went mad. That was a week of horror. We had been on just such another hunting trip as this. He had been acting strange for months, was excitable, then had moods of depression. Then the killing of animals seemed the final thing to send him completely off. His excitement grew explosively. He began to talk constantly, told the most absurd tales, yet was able to repeat them time and again.

Fantastic adventures he had known that grew with the telling, yet he never forgot a detail once recounted.

But he didn't sleep. Neither did the rest of the party. All night and all day he loped across the cabin or the yard, talking incessantly, his eyes wild, excited, then happy. Sometimes a sweet, childlike look in his face, then a mad anger.

And you couldn't cross him in anything. It was almost impos-

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sible to do anything with him. He wouldn't hear of leaving, but finally I had hit on a way to make him behave.

He was constantly running to me with some tale of the others. They were all insane, all completely mad and did the craziest things. One day he flew into the kitchen in excited rage.

Oscar was completely mad, he said. The only thing to do was tie him up and ship him off.

AN IDEA had struck me. Solemnly, I agreed, but softly suggested that we didn't want to hurt poor old Oscar. After all, he couldn't help himself. We must humor him. No matter what he said we must try to do exactly what he suggested, then we could get him to the hospital and perhaps he could be cured.

George had thought a minute, smiled and agreed with me. After that he took great pains to do exactly what Oscar wanted. Even agreed to accompany him home quietly, sat in the doctor's office, while the doctor—who was in on the trick—apparently examined Oscar.

Luckily, George was placed in an institution, and luckily a few shock treatments were all that he needed to restore his mind.

Well. It's an ill wind, etc., so this experience proved that I was not crazy. If so, I would never doubt my own sanity. I arose to leave the mad woman. She eyed me cunningly. I still had the turkeys, though she held on to the squirrels.

But one thing I had forgotten in my fear.

The wall!

I ran into it again, and she smiled jubilantly as I fell to the earth in my surprise and despair.

"Thought you'd get away with it, didn't you?" she chuckled. "Can't kill Effie's pets and get away from her."

I wanted to scream but no sound came from my throat. At last I managed to whisper, "Are you a witch?"

"Witch," she cackled. "Now, whatever give you that thought?"

"Then why—what have you done to me?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she leered at me.

"Effie," I said placatingly, "let me go. I won't kill any more of your pets."

But the word "kill" sent her into another rage, "Never!" she shrieked. "I'll never let you go! I'll learn them. Can't kill Effie's pets! I'll keep you here for eons and eons and eons!"

"Effie," I groveled before her, "I must leave, Effie. I must! Please."

"No," she said. "Never!"

"Then I'll find a way out!" I shouted, feeling as mad as she sounded. I began to run around the enclosure, bumping into the

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"wall." Before long I was bruised and sick. All the way around I went, then again. There WASN'T any way out.

And always near me I heard Effie's cackle. She never tired.

Sometime during the night, exhausted, I fell asleep against the wall. The autumn birds woke me with their songs pouring all over and around me.

IT WAS a nightmare. I thought in relief, it is morning now. I'll go home and try to explain to Rafe. I stood up, stretched, then recoiled in horror as my hand touched the invisible wall.

Effie's giggle told me it WASN'T a nightmare. Evidently, she had meant it when she said she would keep me here for eons and eons.

And there was no chance of rescue. Hadn't Rafe said that he wouldn't cross that fence? Nor would anyone else that he knew. I tried to remember our conversation, and suddenly recalled the last thing he had said. "If you need any help," he had remarked, almost casually, "just call Jock." Of course, I thought. Why hadn't I remembered?

"Jock!" I yelled as loud as I could. "Jock! Help me please."

Instantly, Effie was beside me, her cold, clammy hand over my mouth. I struggled. Was she going to strangle me? Gad, but she was strong!

"Call Jock will you?" she said savagely. "Just try again and see what happens!"

A large, gnarled, dirty hand took her fingers and wrested them from my face. "What's going on Effie?" A gruff, yet kindly masculine voice asked. "What are you doing to this fellow?"

"Thank God you've come!" I gasped. "Your sister is mad. Why didn't you come before now?" His face was wrinkled and as dirty as Effie's, but his eyes were gentle, kind in his dirty face.

"Good hunting." He glanced at the game on the path. Effie had dropped the squirrels to hold me. "She wouldn't never let me kill them neither," Jock grumbled. Crazy as a loon all her life." Then he seemed to remember my question.

"Would a come sooner," he explained, "but I ain't learned her trick yet. She comes any time she's a mind to, but I got to wait until I'm called before I can make it."

I was almost weeping with relief. "Well, now that you're here, let me out of this place if you can."

He moved towards the invisible wall, but Effie was on him like a tiger, screeching and clawing. I reached to help him. I knew her strength, but he motioned me away.

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So I stood in this nightmare while two spirits, ghosts, or whatever you wish to call them, fought savagely.

FOR a while she seemed to be getting the best of it. But Jock was a man, with a man's strength; and slowly, he subdued her. Finally, he took off his belt; an old rope twisted about his middle. With this he tied Effie's hands and feet while she scrabbled, coughed and yelled to be free.

Then he went to the wall. I saw his muscles heave as he moved the transparent logs; heard the thud as they dropped to the earth, but not a thing could I see.

"All right," he said when he had finished, and motioned for me to leave. I started to run. "Take the turkeys if you wish," he said.

But I looked at the game with loathing. During the night it had bred worms and stank!

I rushed towards the wall. It was gone. I leaped over the fence and turned to thank Jock. What could I do for the fellow? How COULD I thank him?

BUT HE WASN'T THERE!

Three feet from me I saw the turkeys, and beside the place where he had bound Effie were the squirrels. Leaning against a sapling was my gun. One hundred and fifty dollars worth of gun. There, too, was my hunting knife and wallet. It must have fallen out of my pocket while I struggled with Effie.

In the wallet was about four hundred in bills, my driver's license, social security number, and several receipts and pictures that I valued highly.

But I valued my life more highly. I heard Effie snarl. "He got away eh?" For a minute, I

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thought I felt her cold hand reaching for mine from her side of the fence.

I turned and rushed frantically from the place.

I was sobbing helplessly as Rafe met me. He handed me a vacuum bottle of coffee, then poured it for me as he saw I was unable because of the shaking of my hands.

"Didn't know if you'd git out alive or not," he said. "When you didn't come in last night I knowed she'd found you."

"Why didn't you stop me?" I asked idignantly.

"Stop you!" His voice was almost angry. "I warned you didn't I?"

"But you should have told me."

"You wouldn't a believed," he said shortly.

I started to expostulate, but stopped. He was right of course. I WOULDN'T have believed. And neither would Oscar, Grady or anyone believe me. I must have imagined it anyhow, or dreamed it. What a fool thing to dream.

"Rafe," I said, suddenly chummy. "I left my gun and wallet inside the old fence. I'll give you a hundred dollars to get them for me."

"Get 'em yourself," he grunted. "I wouldn't try for a thousand."

Well—I left them there. It was silly of course. But how did I know? Perhaps there was some—charm on the place. I might dream again.

After a hot bath in a tin tub behind the kitchen stove, I took the mirror to shave. My face—my cheek felt sore as if a briar were sticking in it.

I raised the brush to lather my chin, but stopped. There WAS something in my cheek. Looked like a—thorn—I hoped.

Carefully, I took my knife and removed it.

It was a claw like, round, dirty fingernail. Too small to fit any of my fingers, besides none of them were torn.

I still have the fingernail. It is here, on my desk now, under glass.

I took to reading more, writing, delving into old books, collecting odd stories and curious objects.

Hunting?

Well, I didn't bother to hunt again ever.

And people may think it odd, but on Thanksgiving day we have ham or roast at our house. Of one thing you can be sure. We never have, and never will as long as I am head of my house, have the traditional bird.

You see, since she loved them so much, I just—couldn't eat one of Effie's pets.

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BLACK HEATH

BY FARFAL DELANO

IT WAS my afternoon off. I left the hospital enjoying a genuine relief and sense of freedom from being off duty. I brought along my telescope since it was a fine day, bright and unusually warm for this time of year, and I knew how clear the valley would be from a certain vantage spot. I had in mind a bare jutting rock which I had seen many times from the window of the hospital canteen. The view, I imagined, would be like looking off into eternity. That was why I had to reach the rocky cliff.

I realized that I must forget the hospital for a few hours. For almost two weeks without stop

. . . words that returned like waves after the speaker had disappeared.

Heading by Anthony DiGiannurio

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I had worked among that lot of human wreckage that had once been part of the 32nd Division. Hundreds of war-weary wraiths had been flown from Buna to the mainland and then by Australian hospital trains to us. A more emaciated, maimed, malarial, and jungle rotted and war-disillusioned bunch had never returned from a campaign before! And yet they had beaten the Jap wherever they met him, although they had not done so well with that other enemy—the jungle.

My descent was careful. The ground was very dry and loosely rocked throughout the slope of the hill. There were trees in spots, but mostly charred stumps remained in tomb-like memory of what once had been a woods. I expected to see reptiles crawling among the crevices and stones. It was a desolate terrain. I made my way into a miniature canyon, and for the moment my goal, the rock, was out of sight. I hesitated in the hollow, for several times I had heard the peculiar and almost bleating call of the Australian crow. Was it more like a cat mewing or like a baby crying? Climbing again I noticed that the timber on this side had escaped the fire. At the top I saw my goal once more, slightly below and not far away. The valley was much closer now, and as I looked behind and above, there were the hospital buildings along the ledge of the mountain. Only shortly ago these buildings had been one of Australia's most famous hotels.

AT LAST I stepped on the rock and adjusted my glass to the magnificent world below. There was a precipitous drop from where I stood to the tree tops. A catcall suddenly sounded near. Then I saw a great black bird leaving a tree top from an adjacent crag. Its wings took on a silverish hue in the sunlight. Despite its bulk the bird flew with a wonderful grace and soon became a diminishing tar spot in my glass. I kept looking, fascinated when a voice from behind split the natural silence.

"What a marvelous bird!"

I was startled. I had heard no one approaching my isolated perch. So quickly had I turned about that my balance became uncertain. At the sight of the unexpected company I felt my scalp crawl and chill. A tall bald figure with dark beady eyes faced me. He leaned on a heavy knotted walking stick as if for support. There was a sickly grayish hue about his facial skin. A long bloodless nose drooped loosely over what was not much more than a thin line for lips. Instantly I was reminded of a vulture.

"I see you are interested in birds—" he began.

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"Yes—a hobby of mine," I said cautiously.

"Good-o, we have something in common, digger. You're a Yank, of course?"

I nodded feeling somewhat more at ease. I noticed that his voice was weak and trilling, as though his larynx was injured. When he spoke his Adam's apple throbbed and vibrated noticeably in a neck which was very long, frightfully thin, and parched like old wallpaper. His speech seemed to have less, too, of the typical Australian nasal quality, and I imagined that behind his gaunt form there was some culture of note. I couldn't help but wonder how he had in his apparent-debilitated condition made the difficult descent.

"They are more than a hobby to me," he continued. "Birds have been a passionate study for me a long while . . . they are the most fascinating of all earth's creatures. . . ."

I was a bit alarmed by his enthusiasm. He had stared off into space as he talked, definitely lost in his own thought world. For a moment, following his eyes, I was diverted by the bed of the valley. I could plainly discern the white ribbon of a road winding through the green flats running on past toy houses, and finally disappearing among the enclosing hills which formed a western barrier.

Then I turned again to the awesome stranger. He remained still, buttressed by the crude stick, and peering obliviously into nowhere. I judged him to be about fifty, although in physical preservation, he seemed ancient. I knew that I was looking at an abnormal human, but before I could ponder him further he pointed to the sky and gestured for my glass. How avidly he focused his eyes on two more crows soaring over the gum trees. And then suddenly his hands came to my attention. The fingers, the longest I've ever seen, were incredibly bony and claw-like! How grotesquely unhuman they were, curled and talonated about my telescope. I bit my lip to suppress a shudder.

"See how amazingly beautiful they glide!" he exclaimed with a note of reverence which I couldn't mistake. Then without removing his eye from the glass, he asked with strange graveness, "Did you ever think that man could fly also if he knew how?"

It wasn't the words so much, but rather the deliberate and calm way in which he asked the question that caught me unprepared. Somehow I understood that he didn't expect a contradictory reply. There was something preparatory about his whole approach to the subject.

"You mean of course like a

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bird?" I said a bit cautiously.

"Yes, certainly," he replied returning my telescope abruptly. "Then you doubt the possibility?"

I decided to be careful, and at the same time tactful and logical if possible. I steadily made my way back from the edge of the rock, having felt uncomfortable since his arrival, first with my back to him and now with it to the dizzy drop and the valley.

"I have learned not to doubt anything too strongly. Since man can run, walk, jump, swim, crawl —then why not fly? And man does fly—faster than the birds or any other creature. Of course, he is mechanically aided, it is true. If it weren't for man's ingenuity, he would have to be satisfied with the good earth. Man isn't built to fly . . ."

"You believe that . . . !"

"Yes. Birds have been given the bodies to fly, to contradict gravity. Their hollow bones, wing formation which is logically shaped and unusually light in structure all prove it. I'll admit that man has imitated the bird . . . if man . . ."

"If man," he interrupted again, "if man had something in common with the bird, he might fly, aye?"

"Yes," I said cautiously.

HE SEEMED to be waiting for the slightest concession. Like a clever lawyer looking for an opening. There appeared a cunning glint in his beady eyes. It was that concealment-before-revelation look.

"Suppose I tell you that I know a man who can fly!"

It was evident that our conversation had now reached its specious limit. I was beginning to feel like a victim suddenly aware of a hoax. Furthermore I had my doubts about the man's sanity. He was too serious to be rational. I had wasted enough of my own time.

I said skeptically as possible: "I'm afraid I'd have to see that for myself to believe it." I wanted to end the matter right then. He faced me squarely and solemnly, as a minister might confront a heretic, and his facial muscles were taut with purpose.

"Then you shall see for yourself. You will be the first to see man fly!"

Who was this maniac? I wondered if he had just escaped from some cell. The situation had reached a point of incredulity for me. I heard him speaking in his unearthly voice, a voice that almost reminded me of a whistling from far off.

"Tonight you will come to my house. I live in the small stone cottage, the first one on the right side before you reach Black Heath. I shall expect you then?"

"Yes," I replied without pro-

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mise or intention behind my words.

"If you get lost, ask for Amos Arlen's place. I shall be waiting for you, young man."

He started away, but turned shortly and pointed at me with his rough walking stick. "You will see something tonight that you will never forget—should you live a hundred years. Remember that!"

His words returned again and again like waves even after he had disappeared among the brush. I tried to shake off my discomfort, but there continually reappeared the image of that hapless being to haunt me in broad daylight. I pocketed my telescope and started back toward the hospital. It was difficult to rationalize what had just happened with the reality of the world about me. Amos Arlen be damned!

THAT evening after dinner I was resting by one the spacious windows overlooking the valley. This room with such a scenic vista had formerly been the hotel lounge and bar, but now by the fortuitous circumstances of war was our canteen. Except for a pair of chess enthusiasts, the PX attendant, and myself the place was unjustifiably neglected. I knew from experience that all those who were not on duty were likely to be in Katoomba enjoying the local movies, bars, and women. I was ever bewitched by the magnificent view so generous and restful to my vision. My eyes sprawled and crawled lazily over the valley into the Blue Mountains. I noted the brilliant sunset beyond the hills making a serrated silhouette against the far away horizon. There were pastel streamers of red, orange, and purple interspersed by a blue-jade background. It was as though a broad rainbow had been stretched along the range, but pulled downward much too soon. I watched the hues change, until all that remained was an orange veil, and then this also receded behind the violet barrier.

Then inevitably the strange incident of the afternoon returned to mind. By some queer mental preoccupation I had succeeded in forgetting my bizarre experience for several hours. But now it returned with magnified strength and assumed weird proportions in my fancy. Amos Arlen! Such an obsession was surely psychopathic in any human being. And yet he was determined to prove his idiotic conceit. Why to me? Was it at all possible . . . that he . . . and I shook my head at my own weakening reason. Still at the same time I confess that I was overcome by an inexorable and utterly dominating curiosity. By

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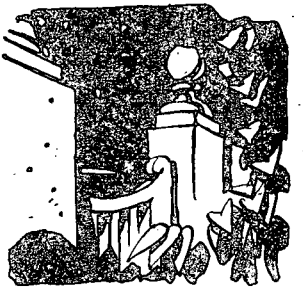
a convenient rationalization I convinced myself sufficiently that even if Arlen was crazy—was he not also dangerous and thereby unsafe while free to roam as he pleased? I waited for the last of daylight to disappear behind the Blue Mountains and then yielded to that irrational impulse that so often triumphs over its rational counterpart.

Black Heath was a few miles north, and since there wasn't any bus connection at this hour I had to walk along a dark road where hearing and feeling meant more than sight most of the way. A few stars were weakly visible, but the moon had not yet emerged from the dark pockets of the night sky. I walked rapidly and despite a chill in the air I soon sensed the warmth of my own blood flowing strongly. My eyes strained in the darkness as I tried to keep to the road which twisted along the lonely Australian bush. Just once was there any relief from the blackness. A freight train passed with a frightful cadence and illuminated the road like a huge torch in a flash, and while it went groaning by I was blind to everything and my blood frozen by the suddenness of the light and sound. At last I recognized familiar risings and descents in the road, and stones and openings among the trees—but how eerily different from daylight memory! I passed several houses on the left, their lights faint yet comforting through the trees. I hastened, for just ahead of me now lay Black Heath. And then suddenly it seemed, there took shape within



a gap in the woods a low built house with a sickly light coming from a window. Approaching nearer I saw that is was a stone cottage. I recalled then that I had seen it some time ago, but until now its image had escaped me. This then was the dwelling of Amos Arlen.

A gravel path led to the gate which was part of an iron spiked fence that evidently made a menacing border all around the house. I could see a dim kerosene lamp flickering through the right front window. The gate creaked rustily as I opened it and died out with a mournful shriekful cry before it stood still. A dog growled within the stone walls as I crunched gravel beneath my heavy shoes on the way to the door. I knocked against a heavy wooden door with an arched top.

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And the dog growled again in a tone that aroused in me a terror I have seldom felt except when threatened with danger of a nightmare quality. I noticed a creepiness over my flesh which left me chilled. I fully regretted my impetuousness which led me to leave the warm comfort of the canteen. Then footsteps approached, stealthy, careful, afraid perhaps. A lock turned and gradually a crack in the door widened. I beheld in the semi-dark an eye, a weak watery eye. At last the full face and the bewildered stare directed at me. There was no recognition in his frightful features. A shadow finally passed like an eclipse over that forsaken visage and it seemed to partially light up as in recollection.

"Good evening—you have come! You'll forgive me for not recognizing you immediately. I was preparing an experiment, so you are just in time. Come in, young man. Be quiet, Ella . . . where're your manners?"

AT THE moment I was more anxious about the dog than anything else. It had been snarling at my ankles with hot breath. It remained close to my legs as I entered Amos Arlen's house. He shut the door and turned the lock and I followed him through an open door into a room, the gloom of which affected me instantly. A small lamp gave sparse illumination and cast ugly shadows over the bare wood floor. I was relieved to see the dog struggle across the floor to a worn oval mat near the empty fireplace. She was an old bitch, fleshy, and hoary. She watched me through cloudy brown eyes.

I sat down on a hard chair near the window and heard the wind rising outside. Arlen seated himself opposite with dog close by his feet. After a hurried look around, I realized that the room was the utmost in cold austerity. The two straight-back chairs and the round little table without covering comprised the furniture. Above the fireplace, in an irregular arrangement were a dozen or so misused and worn volumes. I noticed after adjusting my eyes to the distance that there was a medical encyclopedia, a chemistry text, a taxidermy handbook, and then what was strangest of all, or so it seemed for the moment, in faded gold letter on the spine the following: Tales E. A. Poe. On one of the stained and expressionless walls there was a single portrait in an oval frame. Through the half shadow and half light I was able to distinguish the features of a woman about thirty. Instantly I felt the haughty severity emanating from those steadfast eyes, and the pinched nostrils, and the tight lips which would defy a

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chisel. I could not perceive the remotest ray of warmth in that face. And yet there was in those features something which might have been described as handsome if some terrible strain or anxiety were absent.

"That was my wife, digger. A fine woman—but cold as ice. She's been gone a good time now, poor woman."

The mixture of campassion and bitterness of Arlen's comment left me confused about his marital history. I could not imagine Arlen or his wife living happily together or individually. Observing him more carefully now, I noted his shabby black suit and the stained white shirt with its rounded collar from which hung a loose black tie of ribbon-like style. Here certainly was a fashion anachronism in this year 1942. I offered him a cigaret, but he shook his long bald head quite definitely. I placed my lighter flame to mine with more steadiness than I expected.

"I have a marvelous experiment to show you," he began in the most confidential tone. "But I shall insist on one thing before I allow you to witness. . . ."

"Yes. . . ?"

"You must give me your word that all you see tonight will remain a secret—our secret!"

"You have my promise." And for a long moment I squirmed inwardly under his piercing remorseless scrutiny. I became aware that I had unwittingly placed myself in his power. He arose from his hard chair, and I noticed as he did so that there was a wild sparkle in his eyes. I remained frozen for an instant unable to stand. Amos Arlen watched me with a distant expression. I sensed that some evil force was twisting this man's reason mercilessly. Why I thought this I don't know, perhaps it was the smirk about his mouth, or his eye gleam which now seemed to me so unholy, so baleful.

"Come, I shall show you my lab'rat'ry."

ONLY then did I arise and heard the old dog scrape and pull itself heavily upon all fours after me. I trailed behind the sober form of Arlen, out of the room and into the dark hall, and the sound of keys rattling struck my ears. Arlen stopped somewhere ahead of me and inserted a key with what seemed to me precision, considering the absence of light. A door grunted open, and although I could not distinguish the aperture against the black walls, I knew by both the sound and smell and that perceptive awareness of depth with which a person sometimes walks ahead in the utter darkness that a room was beyond. The room exuded a mixture of staleness,

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dankness, and that sickening chemical formaldehyde. I was feeling some nausea while waiting for Arlen's reappearance and I imagined that people must know the same discomfort upon opening an old tomb.

A match flame burst through the darkness and then the brighter and more steady light of a lamp took its place. Arlen bade me enter with a slow gesture of his long arm. I came into a small narrow room with a low discolored ceiling. Once more I heard the closing of a door behind me and as in the first instance, I felt resentment at being locked in against my will. Presently he placed his lamp on a long work bench along the side of the room. I beheld now, what before appeared only to be shadows, as shelves along the opposite wall. Lined neatly and orderly, like so many black soldiers, were the stuffed bodies of numerous crows in all their coaly plumage. How lifelike they looked. I immediately recognized the work of a master taxidermist in this astonishing collection of morbidity.

"My workroom," he said modestly enough. On the lengthy bench were glass vials, bottles, notebooks, pen and ink, and a small black case of worn leather. The bench top was stained in motley colors and scarred with nicks and scratches.

I said nothing. I believe I was inarticulate with such an ineffable terror by that horrible museum. Although I had turned from the preserved birds, I still suffered their haunting lifeless eyes in my back. I tried in vain to shake off a gloom which had gripped me from the moment I entered this old stone morgue, and had pervaded my senses with an icy awe.

From a drawer Arlen brought forth a vial of red fluid. It could only be . . . no, my dread must be affecting my reason! A current of fear seemed to intermingle and flow along with my bloodstream. With his thin clawlike fingers he held the tube up to the light and silently expressed a mocking approval.

"It is ready!" he exclaimed, satisfied as the devil himself. In a moment he had set down the vial carefully and pulled up from the floor a burlap sack. He reached inside deftly like a magician and drew out something stiff and black. I gasped as I saw another dead crow. The raven feathers had lost some of their iridescent quality.

I heard him say what sounded like genuine compassion: "Poor devil! He flew his last a week ago. You see his blood in that tube? It is chemically ready for use right now. I already have his niche waiting for him among the others on the shelf."

My harried imagination was being strained to the point

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of danger in order for me to get whatever specious understanding there was to this macabre affair. What was the meaning of Arlen's mania and all this terrifying experimentation with one of nature's most melancholy and symbolic creatures? Poe had written what has perhaps become the most quoted poem in our language on that same black bird. But here was a man living with the morbidity he had destroyed and recreated.

A short chilly laugh interrupted my pondering. And turning to him I saw that the man of Black Heath had bared his jagged teeth in laughter. This inhuman outburst had all the echoes of a perverse sense of humor.

"You think I'm mad . . . I can see it in your eyes. You don't understand me. You wonder what this is all about?"

"It is true, I don't understand you."

"Then you shall! I'll tell you, but listen carefully. It is true every word I say."

With a quick gesture that swept the length of the shelves, Amos Arlen lowered his arm and faced me with the most rational look yet, and oddly enough it was that suspicion of sanity in his gaze that froze me more than anything previous, perhaps because it had appeared so unexpectedly. I remained cemented to the floor, stiff as the dead crow on the work bench. From without I heard the wind whistle a shrill, screamlike bar along the eaves of the stone house.

"You see on the shelf twenty-three birds and before me the twenty-fourth. Each represents one month of hard labor. From each I have taken a quantity of blood. It is now two years since I began my incredible experiment. Mind you, two years of exhausting and patient labor. Of pain and agonizing suffering. And now at last I am about to complete my task. Tonight all is finished. . . ."

For a long moment he paused and then once more lifted the red filled vial to the lamp. He seemed very tired and on the verge of collapse.

"After I inject this I shall be ready to prove to all the skeptical world what it has been afraid to acknowledge!"

My clenched hands were sweating. An uncanny anticipation gnawed inside me as I felt a crisis nearing. He appeared to notice my rigid stance and smiled with what may have been sympathy or perhaps it was disdain for my weakness.

"Don't be unduly alarmed, young man. I've injected this formula at least twenty-three times before. You don't believe me. . . ."

"Into your own veins!" I managed to exclaim.

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"Yes, of course. At first it made me very ill—even the smallest amount. I've learned a lot in two years. I've counteracted the bad effects by adding a very simple compound taken from the eucalyptus leaf."

NO LONGER could I disguise my revulsion. The mere idea of the reaction between two different plasmas made me shudder. I tasted a trace of bile forming at the back of my tongue as a nausea began deep within me.

Amos Arlen was filling a syringe from the vial when next I was aware what was happening. My eyes had involuntarily closed a few moments ago. Now he set aside the empty tube and placed the syringe carefully nearby. I watched him remove his black coat and then roll up his sleeve past the elbow. The arm was miserably emaciated, and the veins stood out in ugly, discolored ridges. He raised the syringe expertly and placed the needle into the hollow near his elbow. I closed my eyes again and for an instant wasn't sure of myself. My stomach made a quiver and seemed to jump, but I fought my faintness, and my eyelids pained from their strained closure. I opened them again when the sound of something touched the bench lightly. It was the empty syringe.

"Leave me quickly now," he said. "I must be alone to rest. You have seen only part of the experiment. Tomorrow I shall meet you on the rock where we met this afternoon. You'll come? You must!"

"Yes."

"Good-o. Go now. Tomorrow morning at six. Don't fail me!" He opened the laboratory door and held the lamp in the dark hall. I walked to the front door dazed and unlatched it. I felt completely enervated.

"Good night," he said, closing the door with an urgency.

"Good night," I murmured.

The air revived me. I hardly noticed the chill as the wind blew over my wet body. I hadn't the courage to think about what I had just witnessed. The black road seemed to undulate under my weak legs.

I REALIZE now that time had no meaning for me during that lonely walk back to the army hospital.

I was under a spell—a helpless kind of a mesmerism. I recall finding myself in my room again where I slept alone. The journey through the darkness is almost a blank. I vaguely remember shuddering images of stuffed crows glaring at me with terrible dead eyes. A trance hung over me like a pall. I didn't sleep except in hypnotic dozes. It was a

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nightmare that remained even with the dawn.

With the light of day, I summoned all my will power and partly succeeded in shaking off enough of my obsession to rise and dress myself. I looked at my watch with sudden alarm. It was nearly six! I was very tired and at the same time in the clutches of a nervous weariness that offered no rest. I had to see this haunting experiment through to its tragic end. I had promised to meet him—why, I shall never know. It was too late to call for outside help. I rushed out into the semi-light disheveled and completely discomposed. The sun had not yet arisen enough to brighten the rough trail down to the crag and I stumbled over rocks and dead timber. Nearing the place of rendezvous, I made my way more cautiously. In my shaking heart I hoped desperately there would be no one there. And secretly I tried to convince myself that all this horror was only in my imagination.

But there before me, alone on the gray rock, waited the man of Black Heath. Then all this feverish mental anguish had a fatal reality after all!

"You've come just in time," he said. His skin appeared more ashen than ever. It was like seeing a ghost to behold Amos Arlen in the pale dawn.

"Yes, I've come . . . and perhaps just in time," I half shouted.

"I'm ready for the final test."

"Wait a moment!" I moved toward him step by step.

There was a suspicious leer in his sunken eyes as I neared him. He too was moving, moving closer to the edge, step by step. I made my way very warily inch by inch. How grotesque his lank figure seemed against the ridged horizon! The sun's first beams appeared to pierce his spectral form.

"I came to tell you—" I began "—that I believe what you told me last night. You need not prove any further." I strove to make my words convincing, but they seemed to echo with a hollow insincerity. For a moment he hesitated like a child on the verge of changing its set mind. And then all trace of vacillation faded, and there returned in his face all the distorted determination of purpose of old. I knew any further plea would be futile.

"I don't trust you, Yank. You're like all the others. But you'll see in a moment. You'll be the first to see. . . ."

WITHOUT any warning he raised his pinion-like arms horizontally and resolutely faced the profund depths of the valley. For a breathless moment I watched him pose like a prehistoric bird. And then I rushed

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forth and tripped over his cane and sprawled to the edge of the cliff.

My hands caught in a crevice of the flat stone, while my eyes followed his gravity defying descent with wonder-stricken fascination. What can I say now, except this! For several endless moments I beheld a human figure in the truest semblance of flight. By the most miraculous operations the body of Amos Arlen banked and glided and soared and cleared tree tops with all the grace of a diving bird. And then I shut my eyes, unable to watch any longer, for I felt myself unknowingly sliding from rock, as if drawn by the force of Amos Arlen's aerial wake.

I lay there petrified for the devil-knows-how-long. Then I heard a caw-caw above me and so close that I imagined the crow was lighting on my back. As I turned and stared up in the blue sky, a black feather floated down to my side, and its owner flew beyond the trees. I picked up the raven plume and wondered at the strange souvenir.

By the time I had reached the upper road, my mind was formed on what action to take in the tragic case of Amos Arlen. I had to unburden myself to someone immediately or risk going mad. In the little grocery store I remembered there was a telephone. I found the little booth empty and dialed the operator. I asked for the Black Heath police.

"I want to report a suicide," I said more calmly than I thought possible.

"A suicide!"

"Yes. A man named Amos Arlen from Black Heath . . . never mind who I am now. He jumped from the cliff near the American hospital. Yes, of course, I'm sure. . . ."

I could hear some talking without being able to understand. Then a voice came over the phone. "This is Sergeant Jaimes speaking. Who are you? Pvt. Morris, you say. Will you come immediately? No, stay where you are, Pvt. Morris. We'll send a car. There's something very odd. . . ."

"Odd!"

"Aye, odd. Amos Arlen was arrested ten minutes ago here in Black Heath."

"He's all right?"

The voice laughed: "I wouldn't quite say that. He's crazy. He claims that he can fly. . . !"

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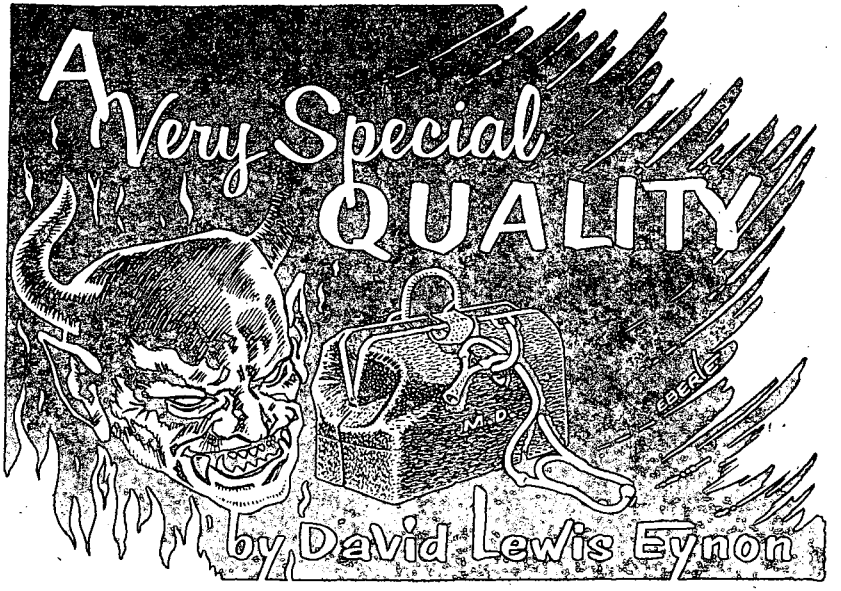
. . . after all, all he wanted was for his name to live forever!



I

"A *GOOD* year, 1937," the devil sighed appreciatively and held his champagne glass up to the light. In his dinner jacket and tartan cummerbund he looked as any of Drayton Foxx's guests might have looked. *They* couldn't have told the exact vintage of the champagne by taste alone, of course—but they would have known it was expensive. All Drayton's things were expensive.

"It's the best year," Foxx corrected. He said it flatly, a statement of fact, with no fear of contradiction. It didn't really matter to him, but he liked to have things straight. Nothing really mattered, much, anymore. At least, expense—which had formerly been his clue to excellence—didn't matter. It didn't give the satisfaction it once had.

"But of course," the Devil nodded and smiled. "It *is* the best year—so far. I was thinking of other years, years that haven't . . . been bottled," his bland smile apologized, "—as yet. In my position, one loses sight of the fact that you couldn't know the future."

"No matter," Drayton shrugged

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and offered an inlaid box, cozy with Havana fillers. "I've just developed a taste for Piper Heidsieck, that's all."

"Yes," the Devil drew deeply on his cigar and blew a large, long cloud of smoke—a cloud worth about seventy-five cents, thought Foxx. "Champagne seems to be somehow. . . . somehow peculiarly *mine*, don't you know? It's quite popular among my clientele."

"I would imagine," Foxx said dryly.

"It leads to so many things," he explained. "It's the symbol of so much that I have to offer. Would you enjoy meeting the founder of this Chateau?" He tapped the bottle lightly. "I can easily arrange it."

"Thanks, no," Foxx swung a chair around and straddled it, facing his guest. "But about your offer," his manner changed to one of business, and with it his poise and savoir faire coiled into a tight spring of purpose, "I'm prepared to meet the usual terms."

"Your soul?" the Devil seemed to hate spoiling the flavor of the moment—the cigar, the wine. He smiled sadly, "That's the standard price, you realize."

"You'd get it anyway," said Foxx. He called a spade a spade, and his rise to vintage champagne and leaded glass had doomed his soul a hundred times over. "In fact, it seems to me you're wasting your time, buying something that's bound to fall into your hands sooner or later."

"I suppose," the Devil took a last, reluctant sip and put his glass aside. "Still, you know, there are always technicalities. And certain sources," his face reflected a look of well-bred distaste, "are always prepared to offer a last minute consideration, I understand. There's nothing they won't do, to save a soul—even a soul like yours."

DRAYTON'S face became wary. He saw the possibility of increasing his demands.

"Why, one scoundrel was snatched from my very hands," the Devil had a look of shocked disbelief, as if he had found a social equal cheating at cards. "A simple deathbed repentance, which he only half meant—he was delirious—and they used *that* as an excuse for salvation." The Devil sighed like a man who has had to endure endless unscrupulosities. "You can see what I'm dealing with."

"Sure." Drayton was all sympathy. "I know how it is. Well, then, will you fix things for me?" He shot a look at the Devil and weighed his own chances of success.

"But, of course, my dear fellow." Satan laid his cigar on the malachite ashtray and fished in

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his jacket for a minute. He extracted a slim, folded sheet of parchment. "You draw up the terms yourself. I hate haggling, you know. And I really haven't time for squabbling over points of order." For a second he looked incredibly weary. "They always squabble in the end, you know. Claim they don't get full measure, or some clause lets them out —nothing personal, you understand," he added hastily.

Drayton took the paper from him and began to write. A few short sentences satisfied him. He signed the document and thrust it towards the Devil.

Satan added his thumb print, folded the sheet again and slipped it inside his jacket.

"You aren't going to read it?" Foxx's eyebrow made an arch.

"Why bother?" The Devil retrieved his cigar and settled back in the overstuffed leather chair. "I understand your problem well enough, I think."

"You've got everything," he waved his hand around the paneled study, "and yet, something eludes you. Your brother-in-law, the one who paints, I believe, is troubling you."

"I've worked hard all my life." Foxx looked earnestly at Satan, as if *he* would surely understand. "Hard! And I've made my way to the top. All those years I supported that, that. . . . wastral. And *now,* now that he's sponged off me so long, he's become famous.

"Why, some of my guests only come to meet *him!* And it's me! *I* made it possible!"

"Quite," the Devil nodded. "You've got everything but fame. Still, a press agent, perhaps? A foundation for charity? Your name needn't be unknown."

"But I want something special," Foxx's eyes looked off into a greater distance than the room. "I want a quality that no one else has—something that will make my name known all over the world, forever!"

"A natural urge," said Satan. "It's a feeling I can't deny enjoying myself," he explained modestly.

"You *can* do it, can't you?" Drayton looked at him hungrily. "You will make good on our deal?" For the first time in years

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he felt himself dealing with someone who just might best him.

"Now, now," Satan raised a manicured hand ever so slightly. "My dear fellow. If I do say so myself, my reputation is above question in these matters. Set your mind at rest." He looked pointedly at the cigar box, and Drayton stood up to offer it to him again. "You shall," he struck a match and spoke between puffs, "have everything you asked."

"A special quality," he held the cigar up and rolled it between his thumb and forefinger, admiring the smooth leaves, "that no one else possesses. Not easy, of course, but I'll do it." He smiled and patted Drayton's knee in a fatherly way. "These cigars *are* priceless!"

"And my name?" asked Foxx anxiously.

"Your name shall live forever, nodded the Devil, "among the wisest men in the world." And with that he was gone. A cloud of cigar smoke hung over the chair, and the ice tinkled in the bucket as the empty bottle leaned over towards the edge.

II

DR. SMYTH-ROLLO folded his stethescope. He cleared his throat in his best one hundred dollar visit manner. It was his fifth visit in a week. He was beginning to toy with the idea of a convertible Jaguar.

For a second he was lost in appreciation of the gleaming machine. Perhaps, he thought, Foxx might be stretched out to a Bently with a tonneau—but these respiratory cases never lasted long. Still, there was the fame to consider—and it was all his!

"You say your friends noticed a change?" inquired Smyth-Rollo. "Some subtle metamorphosis?"

"A haunting quality, that's how they described it," said Drayton feebly. "There was a party for my brother-in-law, and the usual writers and artists were there. They all noticed it." He was reliving the pleasant surprise of having become the center of attention. "An odd, wistful look, they said—like nothing they'd ever seen before. As if I were from another world, or something."

"Hmmnnn," Dr. Smyth-Rollo dragged his mind from a Mercedes Benz and faced his patient. "They were right, of course." He brought his fingertips together and nodded—a device he saved for the denouement of his most exclusive cases. "You *do* have an altogether unusual . . . er . . . 'quality.' It's completely new to Medical Science," he said positively, as if he were himself medical science.

"Fatal, of course, ultimately,"

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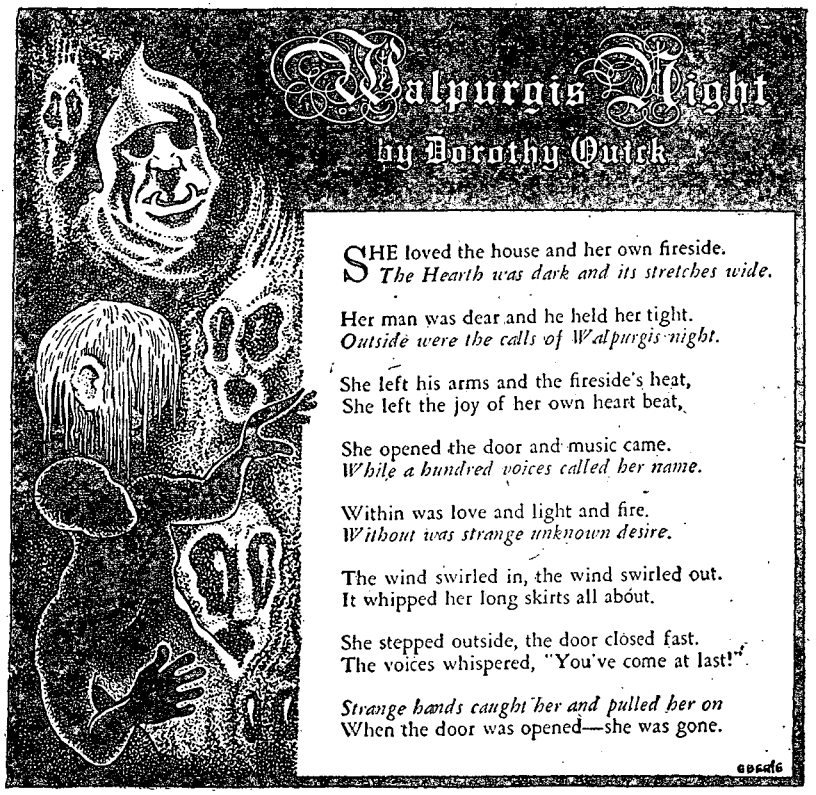
he added. "At least, I should imagine, if it pursues the same course for another week."

Drayton flinched, but knew it was no use arguing.

"I've written a paper for the society," said Smyth-Rollo, as if it could possibly interest Foxx. The Doctor realized his gaucherie and attempted to recover it.

"But still, there's this to think about," he added quickly, "I've called it 'Foxx's Syndrome'—I hope you don't mind?" He looked up into Drayton's desperate eyes, then looked away quickly.

"Remember, old man," he added soothingly as he felt for the doorway, "your name will live in the medical profession forever."



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TIGER DUST

BY BASSETT MORGAN

Neither fever or a dream; those apes had human brains!

WITH an order for Paradise birds to be shipped to a private collector, Dineen decided to see if any could be bought from Omar Sung Loo, a native dealer whose unscrupulous trickery had made all dealers wary of him and caused the captains of cargo boats to refuse to carry his trapped animals and birds. Dineen had been cheated by Omar Sung Loo in his early days of collecting, but he had cut his eyeteeth in the game and wiped off his score against the native dealer. He was on his guard, however, and with him went his chief trapper and right-hand man, Tom Rourke, big devil-may-care Irishman, equally at home with the

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natives and white men in their gathering-places of Malaysia.

Over a drink before they started, Rourke unbosomed the fact that he had taken a native wife.

"Faith, a man that might any day set his foot on the tail of a king cobra has no business to marry a nice white girl," he said. "Should I meet up wid a hungry tiger, my fate wouldn't be good for her to contemplate. But native women understand their country an' its peculiar accidents. What's more, they have ways of avengin' a man just as white widows have accident insurance claims. There's a sayin' that where nature grows a poison the antidote is near by. Maybe 'tis true. But anyway I paid dear for a little golden native woman from the temple. She dances finely, an' she knows native magic. I hope you'll feel free to visit our bungalow any time, sir."

Time came when Dineen wished to God he had not bothered with the order for Paradise birds or met Rourke's native wife.

THE cages in Omar Sung Loo's kampong were small and badly kept. The luckless prisoners drooped in merciless sun heat. Omar Sung Loo was a mongrel of bad ancestry despised by Malays and Chinese alike, and as Dineen stole his business by honest dealings, Omar Sung Loo went in for side-show freaks. There was a two-headed carabao calf, an elephant with twenty instead of eighteen toes held for a high price from nabobs who considered them lucky, and in a case two cobras joined for three-quarters of their length. Rourke spat with disgust as he looked at them.

"Freaks should be killed," he mentioned. "But, Dineen, damned if them cobras look as if they were born that way! Look at the puckered scar between them."

Omar Sung Loo led them to a shallow pond where a small monkey lay along the sloping bank, its lower extremity in the water. Dineen cursed as he gazed. Instead of legs the tail of a fish was joined to its hips! Agony burned in its eyes. It snatched at a banana Omar offered and a Chinese attendant forced a tablet down its throat, which seemed to relieve its pain. It would not live long, but Omar Sung Loo tried hard to make Dineen buy it while it lived.

Oriental curio shops are full of mummied monkeys bodies joined to dried fishtails, the "mermaid" of commerce, but Dineen realized some hellishly ingenious master surgeon had attempted this revolting living experiment. Rourke's curses were livid. His hand went to his pocket and the searing sunlight shone on

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a small black revolver in his hand.

"I'm of two minds whether to shoot you or the monkey," he said to Omar Sung Loo, who backed away from the belligerent Irishman and snarled out an order. The Chinese darted to a cage and howled a warning. From the open door swung the head of a tiger.

Omar was running to the house and the two white men followed. Dineen knew that trick of Omar's to frighten visitors by the peril of a tiger on the loose and gouge cumshaw from them. But this time the Chinese was having trouble jamming the cage door on the tiger's neck to force him back into the cage. The beast had a foreleg outside the bars. They heard the wooden rods splinter and the tiger leaped down, letting out roars of defiance. The Chinese fled for cover and Omar cursed as the tiger cleared the kampong fence at one bound.

SHRIEKS of frightened villagers shrilled through the heated silence, but Omar snarled commands and the coolies opened the kampong gates and wheeled the tiger cage across the opening. Then Omar took a small sack from his turban folds and loosed the puckering string.

In the sun-baked emptiness of the village road stalked the royal beast, roaring at intervals. A native coming down the road unaware of peril saw it and ran up the kampong fence in an incredible burst of agility and dived over. Rourke chuckled. But Omar went into the road and tossed a little powder from the pouch in his hand. The tiger crouched with lashing tail, ready to spring, took a crawling step forward and sniffed the white powder. Instead of leaping, it began to lick the dust. Omar dribbled a line of white powder to the cage and the beast lapped and purred, rolling as it went along licking the powder to a few grains on the floor of the cage. The cage door was jammed shut, with a contented, purring tiger inside.

With a malignant smirk Omar turned to the two white men.

"My lord knows his master," he said.

"Will you sell me some of that powder?" asked Dineen.

"No, Tuan, it is my great secret," said Omar, drawing up the pouch string. An instant later Rourke's hand darted, snatched the pouch, and with his gun covering Omar's breast he nudged Dineen to go and backed out of the place with the curses and threats of Omar Sung Loo shrieked after them.

"Curses don't worry me none," said Rourke. "But he's said 'em of a nature to blast my body now an' my soul hereafter."

No native showed a face to them in that otherwise friendly

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village as they plodded the hot road back to Soerabaya after a fruitless search for birds, and with trouble hot on their heels for the theft of the tiger dust.

"I'll go get ye some birds," said Rourke. "It'd be as well fer me to get inland anyway. Omar is lower than a cobra, but he's clever an' he's in with the worst fiends of undiluted Asiatic hellishness this side o' Sheol. Dineen, some o' his Chink surgeons joined them two cobras, sure as I live! I've heard o' graftin' fins on fish, but that monkey business makes a man sick inside. He's got smart surgeons on his staff, an' no laws o' God or man, heaven or hell to keep him in bounds. I'll give that tiger dust to my wife, who believes tigers have souls. She even says humans can change into tigers, an'—" Rourke launched into stories of were-tigers that lasted until they were back at the hotel, bathed and sipping cool drinks.

NEXT day Rourke departed for the interior after Paradise birds, and Dineen waited. No word came for months and he grew worried and decided to call on Rourke's native wife in a village of the interior. He came after the heat of the day to a pretty bungalow covered with wine-colored bougainvillea, and coming up the path heard the soft notes of a native bell-gong and the croon of a love song which ceased as he drew near. Rourke's wife came to the porch clad in a silk sarong, her dark hair in a coil over one ear, a red flower over the other.

She was dainty and pretty, but her dark eyes held the enigmatic look of coquetry arrested in full flush by tragedy. He had brought her a string of small seed pearls as a wedding gift, but dropping them into her hand made him feel as awkward as if he gave red-heeled slippers to a nun. She spoke port English and he asked if she had heard from Rourke.

Dineen came from that interview with a chill in spite of the tropic heat. Undoubtedly Rourke's wife was fey. Her passion for Rourke was apparent, her loyalty intense. She talked queerly, cautiously, but she said evil had befallen her man. She had heard him calling in agony yet warning her not to try to reach him. He was not dead, yet devils tormented him. He loved her, yet their life together was ended. He commanded her not to avenge him as love might prompt. Dineen realized that she accepted her loss with native philosophy but she was waiting to learn the mystery regarding Rourke and brooding vengeance in spite of his warning.

Dineen decided to search for his chief trapper, and Rourke's wife sent him a relative of her

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family named Inbam who knew Rourke and was loyal to his wife. Inbam gathered native carriers and supplies for the trip, one item of which surprised Dineen, a supply of thick long candles. Dineen reminded Inbam that they had flashlights, but the native said Rourke always carried "corpse-candles," which in case of his death were to be lighted around his body. Rourke's wife added her gift for good luck, a treasured crucifix of Rourke's, finely carved of ebony and ivory wrapped in a length of silk, which Dineen placed in the box containing the "corpse-candles" and some canned and bottled delicacies for his own personal use.

NATIVE canoes took them up shoreless rivers where mangrove pods ripen on branches and drop roots in tenuous webs bedded in the ooze. Crocodiles rested their opened jaws on the roots and small sicsac birds flew in and out taking food particles from their fangs. The country swarmed with small monkeys that scattered when a big orang-outang would come along and peer curiously at the canoes. Dineen noticed his natives were uneasy from the start, and their fears affected him. But there were compensations for the discomforts of insects and leeches and guarding against the swinging tails of crocodiles. The mountain peaks were mist-wreathed, the wooded jungles held orchids like tinted flames. Birds of Paradise danced on upper tree branches at sunrise. There were flashes of gaudy parrots and butterflies like wind-blown bits of gay silks.

They found a blazed trail where Rourke had cut his way inland. But the irritating thing to Dineen was the constant torturing roll and stuttering of native drums talking back and forth.

Inbam, who understood the drum gossip, was worried. The other natives wanted to turn back, but there is a penalty for deserting a white man in the jungle; also, Inbam held over them the fear of vengeance from Rourke's wife, who had a definite reputation as a sorceress.

Leaving the canoes, they went through saw-edged jungle grass, plagued by leeches and stinging insects. Around the evening campfire the men picked off leeches and polished their jimats, which are charms against evil. The villagers met with were friendly and they remembered Rourke going through, but refused to furnish guides. "There are debbil-debbils," they said.

Inbam translated, but Dineen did not scoff. There was tangible apprehension in his own mind, a feeling of weird things going forward in the jungle. He decided that a rest from the labori-

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ous traveling and a little hunting might cheer the men. Birds were plentiful. So at the foot of a hill range standing like the vertebrae of a monster that had fossilized as it crawled seaward, they made camp.

Dineen's personal supplies were kept in a hut they built on high stilt legs. He was sitting in the doorway one sundown when he saw a huge orang-outang standing in the crotch of a nearby tree holding the branches apart and peering down. Inbam also saw it and silently handed up a gun to Dineen's hand. Instantly the branches crashed together, the ape fled, and the swish of other branches springing back as it leaped from one to another told of its size and weight.

That night the native drums were livelier. Inbam went to the nearest village and returned late with a tale that kept Dineen awake longer than usual. He said a native girl had been carried into the jungle by one of the orang-outangs. The villagers were mourning her loss and talking about terrible magic in the hills. Inbam's own tale was interrupted as he ceased speaking, pointed toward the tree, and in the moonlight Dineen saw again an orang-outang with its fangs bared as if it grinned. There came a bellow from that hairy throat which sent the men lying around the small campfire scuttling toward the hut, their curved knives ready for defense.

The big ape stood on a branch balanced by its hand-grip on a higher limb and from its black lips came sounds so uncouth that Dineen felt the hair prickling on the nape of his neck. He could have sworn he heard the creature mouth words:

"By, Tuan, by . . ." which means "It is true, Tuan."

A silence bred of fear held Dineen mute. Slowly and laboriously the great ape mouthed sounds like Malay words. The natives huddled together, whispering in terror. At Dineen's ear Inbam breathed:

"He says 'orange puteh ubat,' Tuan. He wants white man medicine. What devil is it that gives speech to a man of the woods, Tuan?"

"That is foolish talk," said Dineen stubbornly. "Your wits wander. Get the express rifle." But at sight of Dineen with the elephant gun in his hand, the ape disappeared.

Below the hut the natives were chattering in frenzied outburst and Dineen knew they were ready to bolt.

"It is an ape that somebody had trained and taught to speak," he said, knowing it was folly to contradict their belief that the creature had used their own speech. He did not yet believe it,

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and his men needed to be handled carefully lest they desert him now.

THAT night the drums spoke in purring spurts and tattoo rolls, bursting sometimes into violent throbbing, and his men lay awake whispering. At dawn they pleaded to leave this evil place. Dineen was one white man among a crowd of savages almost uncontrollable from superstitious fear. He started them placing bird-line on sticks to lodge in the trees and building cages on tall poles beyond the reach of snakes; then he led them into the jungle to hunt.

That night in camp, while supper was cooking, he sat cleaning off leeches that had penetrated his puttees and laced boots, and decided to open canned peaches for a treat. He pulled the box with his clothing from under the camp bed and groped for the other case. Then Dineen cursed. The case of precious canned food was gone, and with it the crucifix and candles packed among the bottles. He did not suspect a thief among his own men; yet around the hut lay undisturbed, his shaving tackle, weapons and ammunition, far more appealing to a native from the village. He searched further, then called Inbam, who had discovered that a sack of rice was missing also. The sack had been punctured and rice had trickled from the hole as it was carried away.

At dawn they saw birds alighting to feed on the rice. Dineen marked their swooping flight toward a shadowy crevasse in the hills.

"We'll follow the thief," he announced.

With a few picked men and Inbam he started across the valley and camped near the hills that night. He was wakened from sleep beside the campfire by a sound that lifted his hair. The light of dying embers showed his men crouching or creeping toward him. From the caves of gloom beyond the dim fire-glow came a booming voice like a minor tune played on the bass notes of an ancient organ. No human throat could have emitted its rumbling sonorousness. Inbam touched Dineen's arm and his teeth chattered as he whispered:

"Tuan, the man of the woods sings a mating-song that I have sung to women. It is a devil!"

"I've heard that damned ditty," agreed Dineen. Yet fear clawed at his brain. Cold sweat broke from his pores. "It's that talking ape," he added.

"Yes, Tuan. He is singing to the native girl he stole from the village," said Inbam.

There was a restless rustling of tree branches that told of more than one great ape in the vicin-

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ity. To Dineen's increasing horror there came a gusty burst of profanity in a voice as mighty as that of the singer:

"Shut up, ye damned brute. Quit yer singin' love songs to what the Chinks'll make o' that poor little native girl that ye stole an' dropped in their kampong. God! I could kill ye for doing that if it wouldn't be so hellish lonesome without yer bad company in my own misery." The speech ended with a volly of oaths that should have blasted their victim; then came the reply in port Pidgin from the voice that had been raised in song:

"Be not angry with they servant, Tuan. Long have I followed you into the perils of trapping beasts and birds. Now I am trapped with you. Yet perhaps it was so written. Strange magic I have seen, yet never did I think to be caught by it. The spirit of my first woman entered into the body of a tigress. Now my spirit has entered into the body of a man of the woods."

A snarl ended the stentorian musings. Dineen pinched his own forearm until it hurt convincing himself that he was not dreaming. The crashing of tree branches ended the jungle parley.

THERE was no more sleep for Dineen. At daybreak he led his men toward the purple gap in the hills and again camped at the edge of flat country bordering another crocodile-infested river. Leaving the men and supplies, Dineen and Inbam went forward, picking their way through masses of creepers and rotting deadwood to the gloom of mangroves bordering the water. From one twisted root to another they stepped cautiously. The muggers slipped into the water and sank slowly, their unblinking eyes staring upward, bubbles breaking where they sank. The stench of rotting vegetation and nauseating crocodile odor was thick and heavy. Then as Dineen peered up and down the dark stream he caught sight of a neat modern powerboat on the opposite side, moored to a tree. From where it lay, a trail had been hacked into the farther jungle.

Small monkeys chattered and fled with sudden cries, a sign that orang-outangs were coming. At the sound of distant branches swishing, Dineen turned to retrace his way to solid ground. Inbam was younger and more agile and he left Dineen behind. Creepers cut off Dineen's sight of the native, when suddenly a great ape dropped and confronted the white man.

It stood erect, horribly huge and menacing. Dineen tried to shoot, but as he swung the gun to his shoulder it was wrenched from his grasp by a second orang-outang which hung by its paws

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from an overhead tree branch. His blood seemed to congeal in his flesh as the big ape came nearer, mouthing uncouth sounds that even in his terror Dineen could not refuse to understand.

"Dineen, ye don't know me," it said mournfully. "Ye don't know Rourke, an' I don't blame ye. Ye couldn't believe it's me in this awful shape. But it's true, Dineen. It's Rourke's brain in the head of an ape. That's what the Chinks did to me. Omar Sung Loo's Chink surgeons played their hellish tricks on me an' my trapper, just because I stole that tiger dust o' his. God, what a price fer a man to pay!"

DINEEN felt his senses whirling, his legs wobbling. The stench of the crocodile swamp filled his throat and nostrils and vertigo clamped its claws in his vitals. He tried to leap to the next tree-root and nightmare trying to escape from demons. He stumbled and fell across a mangrove root with his legs in the stinking ooze.

The giant ape came nearer, a paw reached for him. He was lifted close to that terrible face. Then he knew nothing more until his eyes opened on a leafy canopy of cool shade and cleaner wind. It was some minutes before he saw the great apes crouching near him and realized that he lay on a platform of bamboo crudely lashed to branches high in the trees, which swayed gently as the apes moved and shifted their weight.

"Dineen," came the rasping and thick sounds from a tongue that was slowly accustoming itself to human speech, "It's Rourke talkin'. God! I don't blame ye fer doubtin' what I say. But listen to what I'm sayin' an' try to understand. Here, take a swig o' this coconut milk." He whanged a nut on the tree branch and broke the shell.

Dineen's throat was parched and he drank eagerly; then as his head lifted he dropped it again on his arm, hoping to God he dreamed the sight before him. Yet the voice went on relentlessly:

"Dineen, I'm a sight to scare a man, I know, but listen. Omar Sung Loo's Chink surgeons have a kampong near here an' a nice little surgery. Tabak—that's my trapper as was, though he's an ape now same as I am—well, we walked into it innocent as babes. The Chinks was polite and give us food an' drinks. They were both doped, Dineen. An' them devils butchered us an' put our brains into the heads of orang-outangs. They meant to ship us to Omar an' sell us as freaks, but we broke away. Omar owed me a grudge, an' you remember how he cursed me. He said he'd pay back, an' he did."

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IT TOOK time for the slow and labored utterance to voiced. Dineen listened helplessly, and something in that sorrowful wail penetrated past fear, which was his only sensation.

"Ye can't believe," mourned the ape, "but I'll show ye presently how true it is. My wife knows. I went there an' told her I was in a devil land an' could never come home to her again. I told her not to search for me. But I said if Omar Sung Loo came tiger-trapping in the jungles she might slip the word to the natives to let a tiger maul him to death. 'Tis a poor revenge but 'twill keep him from further hellishness. An' Dineen, I want your help now. My man, Tabak—the unbaptized son of a slut!—stole a native girl an' handed her down to the kampong fer this Chink surgeon to make him a sweetheart orang-outang. We stole her before the head wound healed, an' she's here on our tree-nest dyin' by inches. You've some skill with wounds, Dineen. Look at her an' see can ye do anything. I'd end it for her, only it's so damned lonesome, an' Tabak an' me would fight. Somehow I want to live to know Omar is dead first . . . if I can stand it that long."

DINEEN lay shuddering, hearing but not heeding. The great ape lifted him with his back against the tree boles and pointed toward a female ape that sat slumped in a heap as native women sit, its body leaning forward between upthrust knee. Around its head was a pink puckered scar like the edge of a cap. One look at the scar revealed to Dineen the badly infected state. His dread-filled eyes gazed at the other apes and saw the healed scars around their heads. A burst of insane laughter came from his lips.

"It's tough on ye, Dineen, but you're safe with us, if that's any comfort. Tell me about the ape-girl."

"That wound needs surgical attention and disinfectants," he muttered-hoarsely.

"We got none, but there's plenty in the Chink's kampong. You know drugs better'n I do. I'll take ye along."

"I won't go!" Dineen protested, but his resistance was feeble. The big ape was ruthless. Dineen saw that the ape body and instincts were not wholly controlled by the human brain, and Rourke had been a bold hunter, cruel enough when his work demanded. Dineen was slung over his shoulder like a sack, carried in swinging flight that swooped from branch to tree. To save the lashing of branches on his face he ducked his head against the hairy breast and shut his eyes. Presently he must waken from this devil dream. . . .

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There was a glimpse of dark water as the apes leaped and caught branches on the opposite shore; then he saw sun gleams on a bamboo palisade and thatched buildings like large huts. From high in the tree Dineen looked down and saw humans. His first thought was of escape.

Gathering all his strength in a desperate effort he heaved suddenly against the ape's grasp. Then he was falling, slithering through thick-foliaged branches, dropping to the ground inside the stockade. He heard the bellow of the apes and gun-shots crashing. Opening his eyes later he saw a Chinese walking beside him as coolies carried him to the hut. He also saw three orang-outangs chained to trees in the kampong, leaping the length of their fetters, yelling horridly. The Chinese lashed at them with a whip in his hand, and they cowered, whimpering. A fourth ape slumped between its knees like the she-ape in the tree eyrie. Their heads were swathed in bandages, their four paws manacled.

Dineen was glad to lie on a cot on the hut porch behind mosquito netting and drink what was handed him. The Chinese spoke excellent English, but as Dineen cursed the nightmare through which he was enduring so dreadfully, there came further horror.

"It is neither fever nor a dream," said the Chinese. "Those apes have human brains. We experimented long ago in that branch of surgery. My countrymen were adepts at grafting when your Western colleges were being built. Recently we have studied your work and gone ahead tremendously. Animals furnish our greatest field of experimentation. You have seen some poor specimens in the cages of Omar Sung Loo's kampong. He has a market for side-show freaks. We hope he will be able to sell the talking apes which we have successfully produced. It has been possible for us to transplant human brains into the skulls of orang-outangs and have them survive. But unfortunately our greatest prize, a man of your race, escaped with a Malay ape-man. They brought me a native girl who was operated upon, but stole her before her wound healed. She may not survive, for such operations need care in treatment. Those men-apes you see in the kampong speak no English and will not be so valuable for side-show purposes in European countries. So you see how grateful I am that Rourke, the man-ape who captured you, dropped you here. I hope you will enjoy our hospitality until we can trap another orang-outang."

THE sinister menace of the Chinese's words was some

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time penetrating Dineen's mind. He was given highly spiced curry and cool drinks, which he ate and drank gratefully. Then he slept and wakened behind the mosquito-netting of the cot in a contented lethargy only disturbed by the clanking chains and hoarse cries of the ape prisoners.

A COOLIE led him to a bath house and handed him fresh pajamas, comforting and cool to his flesh. He was enjoying the rest, the well-seasoned food and drinks. His body and brain were still too exhausted to anticipate danger or defend himself against it. Except for the chained apes, the place was quiet and deserted, yet the jungle seemed noisier than usual by day, beyond the bamboo fence.

He rose and strolled toward the fence, but two natives appeared armed with ugly-looking krisses and herded him ignominiously back to the porch, where one stood guard while the other summoned the Chinese surgeon.

Courteous of speech yet blandly cruel, the surgeon informed Dineen more fully of the horror awaiting him.

"You must not leave the house."

Anger of the white man toward the Oriental stoicism roused Dineen's rage.

"I'll go where I damn please," he cried. "And you'll stop me at your peril. My men are not far away, remember."

"They cannot enter here," said the Chinese. "Nor are you free to leave, Dineen. I could not part with so fortunate a guest for the experiment I have in view, your own intelligent, trained and educated brain. I lost Rourke, but I shall not risk losing you. Better have another drink, Mr. Dineen, to quiet your nerves."

"Not another drop," shouted Dineen. "I believe you doped my drinks."

"Of course, both your food and drink were doped, as you call it. But is it not better to meet fate which even the bravest man puts off as long as he can, the translation from one existence to another form of life? Think it over. I must attend to that suffering ape in the kampong."

Slowly, frightfully, the ghastly truth dawned in his mind. He sat in a hell of chaotic and frenzied fear, and when the drink was brought, he struck it from the man's hand. He was unarmed, helpless; even his clothes were gone, except the cotton pajamas in which he sat. His body shuddered as he realized the fiendish surgeon fully intended to make an ape of him! Chattering fear took him down the steps to where the Chinese bent over the chained ape, but two Malays dogged his steps and stood beside

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him as he began to plead against the fate in store for him.

The end came suddenly. From the trees dropped a cyclonic fury of fighting apes, bellowing their rage, knocking the Malays aside, seizing them by the feet and swinging their heads against the palms, breaking their skulls like egg-shells. Dineen turned from the sight of the surgeon being torn to shreds. Then he was caught over the shoulder of an ape and swung to the trees, the guttural Malay of Tabak in his ears. The ape-man Rourke was gathering up the surgical instruments, bottles of medicine and rolls of gauze.

A hell of noise, shrieking, roaring, screeching, rang in Dineen's ears until he was carried to the tree platform. The height above ground made him crouch low beside the she-ape which lay limp on its side. When the case of instruments and drugs was thumped down beside him Dineen touched the she-ape's body. He sat back on his heels and shook his head.

"She is dead," he said.

IN THE swaying aerial perch he felt numbed after the fright in his mind and din of the fight. He watched dully as the ape-men picked up the dead orang-outang and lowered her body to the thicket of lianas below, where they vanished. He was alone in the tree as night fell and the prowlers of darkness began their mysterious rustling, the insect clack and clamor arose. He slept and wakened as the Scorpion crawled down the sky and the Southern Cross was dimmed by dawnlight.

He shrank from an attempt to descend, but thirst tortured so badly that summoning his courage he swung from the platform to the nearest branch, and working his way by the tree crotches he reached the protruding root-knees and got to solid ground. He drank from moisture of night dew cupped in leaves, and followed a well-defined trail to higher ground. His men had fled, leaving the cold ashes of a campfire to mark the place where they had been. All day he traveled, following their trail, and at dark he saw small lights flickering against a hill. With a fresh burst of speed he hurried on, then halted. Against the little flames he saw the grotesque figures of the two ape-men.

He would not risk being their prisoner again, and he circled cautiously along a hill slope to a rock from which he could look down. And the fear and repulsion of the unnatural beasts left him as he gazed upon their work. There was a hole scooped from the earth, and in it lay the body of the she-ape with ivory and ebony crucifix stolen from his

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camp hut, on her breast. Around the grave stood his stolen candles, their flames wavering in the soft night breeze. Beside the grave the ape-man Tabak sat crooning that Malay pantun, the love song roared in the night. Dineen remembered that it was the same song he had heard Rourke's native wife singing to the accompaniment of bell-gongs as he went up the path to her bungalow. The voice of Rourke, mournfully unaware of its volume, came to him sorrowfully:

"Corpse-candles don't mean much to her, Tabak, but maybe it'll help her soul find its way home. God help me! I wonder if this purgatory I'm goin' through will be enough fer me to find heaven."

The cool night breeze was clearing Dineen's head of the drugs he had imbibed in the kampong food. He remembered all that had happened, and even believed it now! Yet exhaustion forced him to lie and sleep on the rocky hill. The leeches which had bled him freely by day dropped from his flesh at night. A feeling of fatalism dulled further fear. He was aroused from sleep by a touch on his arm, and the sight of the ape squatting near him was no longer frightening.

"Dineen, I'll be takin' ye to yer camp. Go out with your men. There's nothing you can do for me except kill me, unless maybe you'd see my wife an' tell her to go back to her people an' forget me. There's nothing for her to forgive. We was happy while it lasted."

DINEEN was carried swiftly, not caring where, and dropped on the opening of the hill crevasse into the valley, high enough to look down on his own camp.

"Put him there, Tabak," said the other ape, who carried the gun that had been snatched from Dineen when he met them at the river. "Dineen, when ye get out say a prayer fer the soul o' Tom Rourke. He's had hell enough alive. There can't be worse hell where he's goin'." The rumbling voice held tragic sorrow and despair.

Dineen plunged down the trail. The sound of a shot startled him and he looked back. On the rock ledge one ape writhed in death agony a moment, then limply its body fell from the ledge. Dineen heard it crash in the bushes.

Then the other ape squatted and braced the gun between its feet and placed the muzzle between its open jaws. Its hand reached down the gun-barrel to find the trigger. There was a second report. An inert mass of hair-covered body slumped from sight. Dineen ran on.

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Exhausted, speechless, he came to his camp bleeding from leeches, his feet cut and gashed, his face gray and grim. He gave the command to go out and fell into Inbam's arms. They carried him in a hammock to the dark river and canoe. Repentant over deserting him, Inbam made that trip comfortable and brought him to the house of Rourke's native wife.

For days he lay, nursed by native women, drinking the bitter herb tea that combats fever, his body massaged with scented unguents, his appetite tempted with delicacies. Rourke's wife asked no questions, but Inbam called daily and talked with her for hours. Dineen knew that she heard from the native what had happened in the jungle.

Her house was cool and pleasant, and in time she tried to amuse Dineen with her dances, hre body sheathed in glittering metal cloth sewn with little mirrors. She crooned songs and tapped the soft-voiced bells, and one night she began the love call he had heard roared from the voice of an ape-man in the jungle. Dineen started up from his couch protesting.

"Not that song!" he cried aghast.

"No?" she asked, her hands still stroking chimes from the bell-gong. "It is the song I sang to my man in the night, Tuan. A song he loved. And it is time I was doing what must be done."

"What must you do?" he asked.

"Tuan, the enemy that tortured him must die. Inbam has told me much, and you shouted much in the fever which tortured you. Omar Sung Loo shall not continue his evil magic and fill the jungle with fear!" Her small body seemed to grow in height and dignity. Her soft eyes were black fire.

DINEEN protested very little. No white man can argue a native from a blood feud, and Dineen had no pity for Omar Sung Loo or the surgeons who provided his cages with animal freaks.

With a crash of her hands on the bell-gong, Rourke's wife ran to her room and returned wrapped in a black sarong. She went from the house and did not return until just before dawn. She slept that day like a woman drugged, but the servants looked after Dineen. That night as they sat cross-legged at the tiny low table, she ate little, and again as the moon rose she went from the house. It was two days before she returned. Dineen was wakened by a sound and saw her swaying as she made her way through the house to her room.

Then for several days she stayed in the house and seemed to

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regain spirits that had been exhausted on those nights she was away. A week passed, and one day she said to Dineen:

"Tuan, word has been carried to Omar Sung Loo that there is good tiger-hunting near here. He is coming to trap them. But you must not leave the house while he is near."

A chill touched Dineen's flesh. It was evening, with a red moon like an old doubloon rising behind the hills and turning silver. The hot thick scent of flowers weighted the wind.

"I would like to see a tiger trap him," said Dineen.

"Yes, Tuan"—her voice held a quivering vibrance of satisfaction like the purring of a cat—"but tigers take vengeance on innocent and guilty men alike. It will not be safe for you to be abroad."

"How brave you are," he said, "to say the name of the tiger boldly. Your people always speak of him as 'My Lord'."

He saw her smile in the moonlight.

"Perhaps the Tuan remembers the little bag of tiger dust my beloved took from the unmentionable Omar Sung Loo. It is mine now. Besides, there are tigers and tigers. Most of them are stupid beasts intent only on fending for existence. Has the Tuan heard of the tiger berhantu?"

"Ghost tigers!" he said. "I have heard. Rourke believed in them. I do not. Anyway, it happens I have never killed a tiger, so no spirit need take vengeance on me."

"Tuan, it is not dead tigers you need fear. But you will give me the word of a white Tuan that you will not leave my house until vengeance is accomplished!"

She swayed before him, sitting on her heels with her pretty head bent in supplication. He saw his pearls in a string around the creamy column of her throat. A queer fascination caught him as her head lifted and he looked into the black fire of her eyes, which slowly brightened until they were shining amber in the moonlight porch. He was ready to grant her slightest wish; yet his mood was unaffected by her prettiness as a woman. She was no longer quite normal. He felt the burning desire of her vengeance toward Rourke's murderer as she rose and stood before him motionless, then spread her arms and bent her body as if dedicating herself to a mission.

SHE went from the house, but that night Dineen sat in a porch chair, dozing and waking until the dark hour before dawn, when in the night noises he heard another sound. Something crept stealthily nearer. The slanting moonlight showed a long shape stirring the flower hedge it came

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through. He saw a tawny body. Then to his horror it reared up on its hind legs, and the two forepaws and velvet-striped head of a tiger rose above the floor boards of the porch. He saw its shining green eyes, its bristling whiskers, its black muzzle and white fangs, the long claws clenched on the floor matting.

As he stared, the tiger head changed. Like breath blown on hot metal it was misted and blurred. Before his terrified gaze the velvet strips of the head fused into the black hair of Rourke's wife, framing her amber-tinted face. The tiger body flowed up the steps, transfusing itself into the slender body of the girl, which stood there shuddering, her black hair veiling arms that were torn and scratched. One hand was drawn across her lips and came away stained darkly. Then she saw Dineen in the porch chair.

Rage leaped furiously to life in her tired flesh.

"Tuan, how dare you sleep here? Long have we nursed you through fever. The night chill will bring it on again."

"I'm not afraid of night chill or ghost tigers!" he said gently.

He heard a gasping sob as she vanished in the house, heard her cot creak as she dropped on it to sleep.

That day Dineen sent for Inbam, who was plainly reluctant to speak of the fate of Rourke or the ruse to fetch Omar Sung Loo tiger-trapping until Dineen forced him to talk by mentioning that Inbam had deserted him in the jungle, a crime for which the punishment was severe if complaint was made.

"I shall not interfere with your affairs, Inbam, but I want some questions answered. Otherwise—" his tone held a threat. "Now tell me what became of the helpers of that Chinese surgeon in the jungle kampong."

"Tuan, they were killed by a tigress and the ants have picked their bones."

"And your kinswoman in this house, had she a hand in that vengeance, Inbam?" he asked.

"Of a truth, Tuan, is she not the widow of a white Tuan the Chinese devils killed? More I cannot answer, except that what is written, is written."

"Where does Rourke's widow go by night, Inbam?"

"Tuan, I dare not follow her to know."

"But you know where she goes, Inbam."

"Tuan, I know only that what is written, is written!"

"Where is Omar Sung Loo, Inbam?"

"Word comes that he is on his way to trap tigers and should be here soon."

The widow slept all that day. Intrigued and curious about her,

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Dineen came to her couch and stood looking down through the mosquito-netting. An impulse prompted him to hum the love pantun softly. Hearing it in her sleep, she stirred and sighed and began to murmur words. Dineen listened shamelessly.

"Beloved . . . five have I killed. . . . I leaped from the gloom. My fangs gripped and shook them. A golden death all too merciful for such dogs. They were his men, Beloved. . . . And I have his scent. Your murderer shall not escape long."

DINEEN went quietly away and sat brooding on the mysterious and uncanny problem until tiffin, but the widow did not appear. He finally went to bed but lay awake, and as the moon sailed high he was aware of her soundless gliding to the door and into the flower hedge. He followed and found the black sarong she had left there. He had slept that afternoon and had no difficulty staying awake until the hour she returned. From inside the house he watched again until he heard the soft thud of bounding paws and distinctly saw by a moon late enough to leave its frail ghost by dawnlight, the striped body of the tigress transformed as it glided over the porch, into the body of Rourke's widow. He saw the startling green glow of her eyes as she went to her room. That morning he stood beside her again and saw the change in her appearance.

She had been a dainty, perfumed creature. Now her face was haggard, her amber-colored flesh was scratched, her nails were broken and grimed, and about her was the fetid odor of the great carnivore's breath, faint yet distinct.

As he watched, her body moved, stretched and curled again like a cat, and her fingers flexed and spread like claws. Dineen touched her wrist. Without a movement her eyes opened their glowing green fire; yet in the light the iris narrowed to a thin slit of emerald flame. Her head rubbed against his arm, and like a kitten her tongue licked at his hand.

He jerked back and spoke sharply. Blood oozed to the surface of the skin her tongue had rasped. Then he regretted speaking, for she wakened fully, and he saw she was bewildered, and shuddered convulsively, moaning a little.

"I dreamed, Tuan! I dreamed I was caught in a trap!"

"Then take warning," he said gently. "Leave vengeance to the gods." Then, ashamed of a speech that betrayed his own weak slipping into a belief in this dreadful metemspychosis, he left her abruptly, thinking it was

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high time he cleared out and went back to the haunts of his own logical-minded race.

"Tomororw I leave," he announced to her late that afternoon.

She did not demur, and as usual disappeared as the moon rose. As before, he waited until dawn, but this time his vigil was fruitless. She did not return. Remembering that she sometimes stayed away for a few days, he was not alarmed until Inbam came running in the noonday heat when no native willingly stirs abroad. He was greatly upset and excited and almost incoherent as he blurted out the news that Omar Sung Loo had trapped a splendid tigress and was shipping her back to his kampong.

"Tuan, you must buy this tigress and set it free," wailed Inbam. "I tried to buy it. I offered all I possesed and all my kinsfolk possessed, but he will not sell. Tuan, he trapped the tigress with bags of white dust he scattered, a magic powder that made her forget her cunning and roll in it like a cub at play. But she must be freed, Tuan. Buy her. By your hope of Paradise, you must free this tigress."

Dineen leaned forward in his

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chair, staring at the agonized Inbam.

"Why should I set this tigress free?" he demanded.

"By the spirit of Tuan Rourke who was your friend, you must. Tuan, it is past the belief of a white Tuan. But the tigress is my kinswoman, the wife of Tuan Rourke!"

"Nonsense," shouted Dineen. "You lie to me!"

"Tuan, I speak truth. She is a tigress berhantu. A ghost tigress."

"Then why should cage bars hold her, Inbam?"

"Tuan, it is that magic tiger dust of Omar Sung Loo drugging her senses. She lies contented licking it, rolling in the dirty straw, she who loved perfumes and silks and jewels. Tuan, see her and know if I lie to you. She wears the pearls you gave her on her neck!"

Dineen laughed harshly. These nightmares were sending him mad. Reason was tottering. He would get out at once. Inbam agreed to go with him, but when they started from the village they learned that Omar Sung Loo had gone, the tigress was on her way to his kampong. Driven now by a desire to see the finish of the affair, Dineen followed. The lumbering cage on cart-wheels, drawn by carabaos, was somewhere on the river road, but Dineen took a boat and some time in the night he passed it.

HE WAITED in the village until word came that Omar Sung Loo had returned. Then with a loaded gun in his pocket he went to the Kampong.

Omar Sung Loo stood at the gate and barred his way belligerently. Smirking and defiant, he said he had nothing for sale.

"You captured a tigress. I will buy her," said Dineen.

"She is not for sale, Tuan. Down her black throat has gone more of my magic powder than she is worth. Yet I have an affection for the beast and will not sell her."

"Let me see her!" Dineen's gun poked the belly of Omar Sung Loo and his finger curved on the trigger. The dealer snarled and backed toward the kampong where the tigress lay in her cage on dirty jungle grass, her tongue lolling thirstily, her eyes glowing green with hate and fear. She crouched and snarled as Omar Sung Loo came near, and her lithe paw reached through the bars.

Dineen held Omar Sung Loo in a corner by the cage, with his gun still indenting the brown skin. The cries of Omar fell on heedless ears. Dineen began to whistle, then to sing the tune of the love song he had heard Rourke's wife sing, and again heard roared from the throat of a bull ape in the jungle.

The effect on the tigress was

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startling. She lifted her head and roared. She worked herself into a fury and her long claws tore splinters from the cage bars. Then she went into a flurry that made the wooden crate creek and strain. Omar screeched in fear, his defiance was gone.

"Tuan, she was kept without food or water, but the cage bars cannot hold her now. They are breaking!"

It was true. Two of the bars were gone. The head of the tigress and one foreleg came through. Omar Sung Loo's shaking fingers grabbed a sack of tiger dust from his loin-rag and he tried to loosen the string.

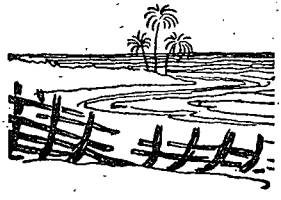
The tigress leaped to earth, and came toward them, her great pads stepping deliberately, daintily, but she was snarling her rage. Fear-stricken, Omar shook the sack of tiger dust, but a hot wind carried it high in air, over the pond. His scream was pitiful, but it was cut short as the tigress leaped.

Dineen whirled as he saw the animal's jaws fasten on the neck of Omar, and she shook him like a rat. His body fell and lay still, blood pulsing from his neck into the dust. Over him the tigress stood, her ears laid back, snarling at Dineen. He saw her body flatten, her muscles gathered to leap.

There came the quick staccato of gunshots and the beautiful beast dropped slowly over the body of the man she had killed.

Dineen darted toward the gate. There he halted to look back. He stared, rubbed his eyes and retraced his steps. A cry of near madness came from his lips.

In the sun-baked kampong dust lay the dead Omar Sung Loo, face down, and over his shoulders was the amber-tinted body of a woman. Blood drained like scarlet ribbons from the bullet wounds in her breast. About her neck was the string of small pearls he had given the wife of Tom Rourke! But it seemed to him her lips smiled and in her partly opened eyes was a look of triumph slowly dimming as they glazed in the chill of death.



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YOU SHOULD BE CAREFUL . . .

. . . what you bring into your house. .

BY GARNETT RADCLIFFE

I RARELY address strangers, but I did the other day. It happened in Prout's second-hand furniture shop in the Denning Road. Near me a middle-aged woman and her friend were debating the purchase of a bed. Chancing to overhear one of them say, "You should be careful what you bring into your house," I was moved to turn to her, raise my hat as to one who has uttered words of great wisdom, and say, "Madam, how right you are!"

I know I was right. I don't mean in speaking to her like that of course, but in endorsing what she'd said. For her words had carried me back over quite a number of years to a thing that happened to me when I was a very young student just come to London to read law at the Rectory College.

Luckily, since I was young and

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callow and unused to City ways, I had a friend who was reading medicine at the same College. He was a sandy-haired lad who hailed from the Highlands. His name was Jock Gillman, and as he shared my tastes for rugger and music we got on famously together.

Finance was our main difficulty. To help to make ends meet we shared a double bed-sitting room in a tall, dark house in the neighborhood of Euston. The furniture, so far as I can remember, consisted of two iron beds, a wardrobe, an old-fashioned washstand of the jug and basin variety and a couple of hard wooden chairs. The wall paper was peeling and discolored; the only lighting was a solitary gas jet; the floor-boards creaked and if you wanted hot water you had to fetch it for yourself from the bathroom three floors below.

All of which sounds rather depressing, but as a matter of fact Jock and I were perfectly content. We were working hard and playing hard, and when you are young and when mind and body are fully occupied, your material surroundings are of small account.

During our second term a minor accident happened, just how I can't remember. Jock heaved a football boot at me, or it may have been *vice versa.* That does not matter. What does matter is that the boot missed its objective and broke the large, thick china basin decorated with roses which stood upon the washhand-stand beside the window.

Mrs. Deacon, she was our landlady and not a bad sort as London landladies of that period went, was justifiably annoyed. She said the basin had been part of a wedding gift from an aunt and would be impossible to replace. Then she changed the still unbroken jug for a cheap enamel one, and told us that if we wanted a basin we must buy one ourselves, or go dirty for all she cared!

Jock and I didn't argue the toss. For all its disadvantages the the room was cheap and clean, and we'd no wish to be evicted. Bowing to the inevitable we united our thin purses and went to Corne Street which is full of second-hand shops, all much humbler establishments than Prout's, in search of an enamel basin to match the jug.

IN THE smallest and dingiest of all the small and dingy second-hand shops in the street, we found just the thing we wanted. It was of medium size, the enamel was scarcely chipped and beneath the dust it was almost as clean as new. Obviously, its previous owner had been a careful person who had treated it with care. He had even scratched

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his initials "S.P." very neatly in the center of the underneath part, and as a means of identification there was the number W.P./3087 stamped close to the initials.

"He didna mean anyone tae pinch his property," I remember Jock saying in his lilting Scots voice.

We took the basin back in triumph to our bed-sitting room and for a time it served us most satisfactorily. Indeed, being lighter and deeper it was an improvement on the predecessor so cherished by Mrs. Deacon. For at least three months nothing unusual happened, and that disposes me to wonder if ghosts need a certain period in which to acclimatize themselves to new surroundings. Or was the delay due to the fact that the cheerful, virile atmosphere in which Jock and I lived was not conducive to "manifestations"?

But the manifestations came all right in the end. The first thing was when one morning Jock accused me of sleep-walking.

"I never do," I said indignantly. "What's put the idea in your head?"

"I've hearrd ye an' I've seen ye," Jock said. "The ither nicht ye were at the washhand-stand latherin' yer honds lok the Lady Macbeth. Ah'm no kiddin . . . There was enough licht frae the moon for me tae see your figure."

Nothing could persuade him otherwise. When I asked why he hadn't woken me up he said he'd been told it was dangerous to wake sleep-walkers.

"Besides, I was a wee bit scairt," he confessed. "You looked a bit uncanny so ah juist kept ma heid beneath the cloths."

AFTER a period of perhaps a week he repeated his accusation. This time we really quarrelled. I told him that if the sleep-walking I didn't do disturbed him so much he had better find someone else to live with, and he retorted he'd a good mind to do so, for he couldn't afford to lose his sleep with the December exams coming on. We spoke in heat, but I don't think either of us had any real intention of parting.

A few nights later, happening to come home before Jock, I surprised a stranger in our room. I didn't realize his presence until I'd struck a match to light the gas jet. Then I saw him quite plainly. There was nothing alarming in his appearance. He was a small, foreign-looking clean-shaven man wearing side-whiskers and a high white collar. When he saw me gaping at him, for I was too taken back to speak, he gave me a shy smile and walked quickly out of the door which I had left open into the darkness of the passage beyond. And by the time I'd col-

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lected myself enough to follow him with the intention of asking what he had been doing in our room he had disappeared.

We didn't take the incident very seriously. Nothing had been stolen and nothing had been disturbed. The obvious explanation was that the stranger had been another of Mrs. Deacon's lodgers —she had about a dozen who were always coming and going —who had gone by mistake into the wrong room. When I'd found him there he had been too embarrassed to offer an explanation.

"Or he may have been a foreigner," I remember saying. "Anyway he didn't look in the least like a burglar."

More weeks passed. Were the powers of darkness slowly concentrating upon our bed-sitting-room? If so, I was quite unaware. I'm not so sure about Jock. He was irritable and had shadows under his eyes as if he was not sleeping well. Perhaps, being a Highlander and therefore "fey," he was more susceptible to the supernatural than I was.

AND then, not long before Christmas, there came the night I will not forget if I live to be a hundred.

Every detail is still fresh in my memory. It was a Saturday night. We had been to a concert at the Gratton Hall and had walked back through the foggy street. When we entered our room we both exclaimed about its coldness. One of us had left the window open and swirls of fog had crept in to hang about the place like shadows.

There was no fire, so bed seemed the warmest place. We undressed very quickly and threw our top coats on the counterpanes as reinforcements against the chill. I was the first in, leaving Jock to extinguish the gas.

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"Nicht-nicht, lad," he said as usual.

I fell asleep at once, but it wasn't as sound a sleep as I usually enjoy. Strange, sad dreams visited my pillow like vampires that came and went.

I think it must have been about two in the morning that I almost but not quite woke up. In the strange no-man's land dividing sleep from consciousness I seemed to be aware of something happening in the room. People moved about and spoke in muted voices. There was a splashing sound as of water being poured into a basin. Then someone seemed to wash his hands with immense care. When that sound ceased there was a cautious creaking of floor boards suggestive of someone walking across the room on tip-toe, and then a moment of utter horror—listening to a sound—like a pair of hands drumming against the door . . .

After that I suppose I slept properly. When I woke it was broad daylight. I heard church bells and remembered with pleasure that it was Sunday morning. There was no need for hurry, and it was Jock's turn to fetch the hot water.

Jock didn't. His bed was empty and the dishevelled clothes were lying on the floor. When I looked round I saw him in his pajamas apparently leaning against the door. He had put a pillow slip over his head so that he looked like a member of the Klu Klux Klan.

At first I thought he was playing some idiotic trick. It took me a little time to realize that he had hanged himself from a hook, using the cord of his trunk for the purpose.

The verdict was mental breakdown due to overwork; and a police witness commented on the expert fashion in which he had tied the noose and adjusted the knot in exactly the right place.

But I say you should be careful what you bring into your house. I say that because a few months after the tragedy I happened to find in an old number of Clayton's magazine an article about a famous hangman who worked at the old Warren street prison until it was given up in 1861, when the prison equipment was sold at public auction.

Solomon Posmansky was the name of that hangman. According to the article he was a very polite, quiet little man. He called the condemned his clients and spoke of executions as "appointments." And before and after every "appointment" he used to wash his hands most scrupulously. When I read that I knew what — and who — we had brought into our room.

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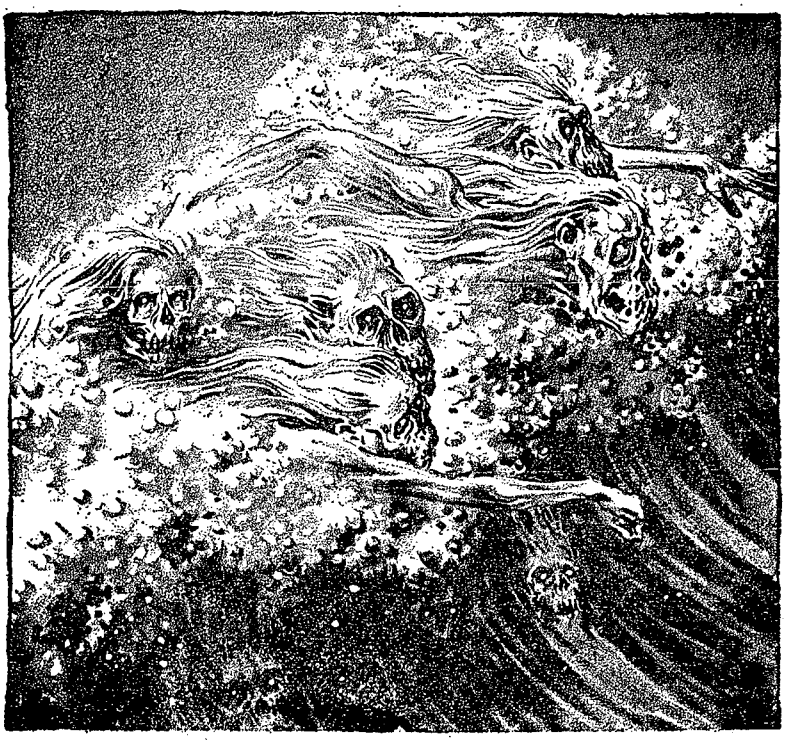
Radar and ghosts—cannot they both work miracles?



Atlantic Isle of Mystery

BY CYRUS MACMILLAN

FAR out in the Atlantic Ocean, many miles south-east of Canada and east of Maine is Sable Island, the Isle of Mysteries. It is one of the enchanted islands of the sea. Strange shapes are said to wander along its bleak lonely shores; doleful

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sounds are heard among its sand dunes; and weird voices come from it by night across the water, bringing fear and warning to seamen who chance to be near its coast. Long ago it was the hiding place of pirates and wreckers. Because of its sunken sand-bars, it has always been the menace and the terror of sailors, who call it the grave-yard of the Atlantic. It is the scene of many disasters; around its shores many deeds of wickedness and cruelty have been done; and there is small wonder that it is still haunted by phantom forms and sounds.

This lonely enchanted island is a low treeless waste twenty miles long, and little more than a mile wide. It is a succession of long gray sand dunes, from twenty to eighty feet high, the color of the sea on a day of clouds, and by night and on dull hazy days when the horizon is fringed with mist, you cannot see it until you are close upon it. It lies in the form of a crescent, the inner side to the north. From each horn of the crescent, a long sand-bar or reef runs seventeen miles out to sea, one to the north-east, the other to the north-west. At low tide a third of each bar is bare, but because of its gray color you cannot mark it from the water around it if you are many yards away; over another third of the reef there is always a strong 'cross-sea which breaks in times of storm into angry white surf; over the remainder of the reef, the water, except in great gales, gives little sign of the deadly trap beneath, so that without warning great ships have often run hard upon it, to be hopelessly stranded.

HERE when a ship strikes there is little chance of rescue. The reefs rise steep and straight almost like a wall; on one side the water is thirty fathoms deep and on the other side it reaches in places to five times that depth. Close in upon the reef a seaman in a great ocean-going ship finds no soundings; he has almost bottomless water for his craft; but in a moment his ship may strike hard upon the bar; if the wind is blowing strong from the sea, the helpless ship pounds over the reef to be engulfed in the deep water on the other side. Here are rapid cross-currents. Nearby, the Gulf Stream comes up from the south, and the great Arctic current flows down from the north, and a cask, when thrown into the sea, is carried around the island many times, as if tossed about in a whirlpool. At times, fogs of great density hang about the barren land. At night phosphorescent lights appear upon the water in all their splendor, until the ocean is in a blaze; and when

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the storms beat and the surf breaks high on the dunes, the fire rises many feet in a strange, weird light. It is a place of mystery and wonder; behind you as you stand upon the beach is the dead waste of sand; before you the restless ocean and the mocking, fugitive horizon. Modern aids to navigation have greatly reduced the dangers of the treacherous reefs.

IN TIMES of storm the island, with its hidden shoals and ledges, gives no shelter nor harbor to vessels near its coast. Even in days of calm, seamen who know its dangers keep far away, well out of reach of its sunken reefs.

Sometimes when the wind blows hard from the south, and storms sweep the Atlantic, great ships caught here in the tempest venture to seek shelter in the hollow of the crescent. They safely ride at anchor where the force of the gale is broken by the long dunes. But let the wind show signs of changing to the north, at once they slip their cables and put far out to sea, for here the stoutest ships that float cannot long survive or beat against the wind that blows in upon the coast. The rotting skeletons of great craft lying in the sand tell sad tales of past attempts to ride out the storms at anchor in the offing.

THIS Isle of Mystery is bleak and barren except for coarse grass and a few hardy plants. Here and there grow great flowering rushes; wild roses and asters and white lilacs bloom at times upon its hills; and berries of various kinds ripen under its sun. Over it, screaming wild fowl constantly hover, ducks and gulls and divers, plover and curlew and pigeons, and you can gather their eggs in boatloads from the crevices in the dunes. It is the home of countless seals, and here in summer you may see the gray Greenland seal and the Harbor seal lying lazily on the hot sands or playing like children in the shallows. The Harbor seals are always here but the Greenland seals are transient visitors, arriving from the north in December, and leaving in the late summer for their home. The waters around the island abound in fish, for the taking of which men daily risk their lives. But the place is most famous for its wonderful ponies—sturdy little horses not much bigger than a large Labrador dog, which are exported to carry children on their backs and in light wicker carriages over distant streets.

The island is said by sailors to be the haunt of goblins but also to be the home of good spirits which guide mariners on their way in days and nights of storm. These storm spirits are

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frequent visitors, for in this weird island tempests quickly spring to life and as quickly die. Often the sun rises clear out of the sea, giving promise of a day of peace, and except for the swell dashing high on the reef and the low moan of the surf as it breaks on the dunes, there is no sign of a coming storm. But suddenly as if by a magic wand, mist appears upon the surface of the hills; the sun is blotted out by a dull leaden haze; darkness settles upon the deep, and for a time there is an uncomfortable silence. Then the wind blows in from the cloud-banked sky in fitful gusts; the storm breaks with a strange and terrible fury, carrying disaster to ships within its zone. Darkness adds to the terror of the storm as the driven sand, like drifting snow, shuts out all objects. For an instant the lightning shows the landward-racing seas with their wild, white surf. No human voice can be heard above the tempest; not even the thunder rises above the roar of the storm. The gale dies as quickly as it came, and soon all is still. But seldom does a ship that chances to be near to the island's coast when the storm bursts survive its fury; it usually adds its bones to the "Graveyard of the Atlantic."

IT IS just before such storms that the good spirits of the island are said to warn seamen of the approaching danger. In the calm period before the gale bursts they appear upon the desolate beach. If you are French, sailors say, you may still see a strange figure with a pointed beard, and in ancient French attire, pacing up and down near to the water's edge and frequently waving his arms about. He is a gentleman of Paris, and he appears only to Frenchmen. He complains that hundreds of years ago in the days of Louis the fourteenth his wife was falsely accused, and unjustly imprisoned. She was later sent to the island as an exile with the first band of colonists. There she died in great misery; and since her death he has always paced the island beach before and after a storm, searching for her and uttering his strange complaints.

THERE is also another figure in old fashioned clothes often seen by fishermen. He is an Englishman who had a prominent part in the execution of an English king more than three hundred years ago. Fearing for his life, he fled in despair to the Island of Mystery, for he knew that in that desolate spot his enemies would be least likely to find him. There he remained until his death, suffering much from cold and hunger. He is said to appear now to sailors before

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a storm to warn them of their danger; and always on the twenty-ninth of May—why, on that date, no one knows—he walks around the island, wearing the broad-brimmed hat of the vanished Puritan age; he sings psalms through his nose so loudly that his weird voice is heard even above the roar of the wind and the thunder of the surf—and fishermen still see and hear him among the mists and vapors of the gray sand hills.

THE two strange shapes most frequently seen by sailors and fishermen are said to be those of the Franciscan monk and the White-robed Lady, the best-known "phantoms" of the island. About them cluster many strange and sad old tales. Long ago the first group of colonists was brought to the island by a nobleman of France. The colonists were largely from the prisons of France, for no others cared to throw away their lives in the unknown and desolate land. With the group came a Franciscan monk,—a wise and handsome but sad man. His life held a tragic secret. In his early youth he loved a girl in his native village and was loved by her in return. She died before either had grown to maturity. The youth could abide no longer in his native place for with her death the joy of his life was extinguished. He joined the Franciscan order. When he heard that a band of colonists was going to the New World, that he might forget his grief and his bewildered hopes, he joined them and sailed with them to the remote Atlantic island. He undertook the spiritual care of the exiled flock and shared their hardship and solitude and dangers. He erected a cross, and built a little hut of wattled reeds and drift-wood that served him as a chapel and a home. For a time all went well. But soon great hardships were endured from cold and hunger and disease—even from strife among the colonists themselves. The majority of the colonists soon perished, and after a vain attempt to live on fish and berries, at the end of five years, those of the band who still survived were taken home by the French Government. The Monk had himself been wasted by the ravages of the Island, but when the time came for the colonists to go home, he refused to embark with them.

"I have no long time to live," he said, "perhaps only a few weeks. While I live, I will stay here to give the shipwrecked what little help I can and to relieve the sufferings of the unfortunate. And I shall die in the little hut which I have built and in which I have prayed for five years like the anchorite of the

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desert. The winds and the sands will charge themselves with my burial." The people to whom he had ministered sailed away sorrowful, leaving him alone behind them.

FOR many years he lived on the Island, and many a shipwrecked mariner shared his hut and scanty fare and owed his life to his kindness. He planted a little garden, and tended it with care; he lived upon its products and upon the shell fish with which the waters abounded. Daily he paced the beach, looking far out to sea for ships, and watching always for shipwrecked sailors. He remained true to his vows and to the memory of the girl of his youth, buried far away among the Brittany hills; and he waited in prayer and contemplation for his own call. When he died and where his dust lies, no man knows. But before a storm, seamen still see him against the background of the gray sand dunes, walking slowly along the shore, reciting his rosary. Sometimes they see him upon the cliffs on his knees in prayer; at other times they see him gliding through the air, his figure clear against the sky, the girdle of St. Francis bound about him, his arms raised in the shape of a cross. And as the strange apparition passes over them, the wild fowl fly in fear from the pools and the fish dart from the shallows.

When he appears, the fishermen know that a storm is on the way, and they stay on shore in the shelter of their huts, and draw their boats far up on the sand out of reach of the surf, and sailors in ships that have anchored in the offing put out to sea far from the treacherous reefs; and they bless the phantom Monk of the vanished century who warned them of their danger.

ABOUT the White-robed Lady there is also a strange sailor's story. In the closing years of the eighteenth century, a British regiment was stationed in a garrisoned sea-coast city in the New World. In the late autumn of the year a large ship left Portsmouth, England, for this garrisoned city with a number of recruits, and several officers with their wives. The ship carried in her cargo much furniture and costly plate and books and jewels, the whole valued at many thousands of pounds sterling. Accompanying this ship as convoys were two other craft. They had not been out many days when there came a great storm from the fury of which they narrowly escaped. One of the ships was dismasted and with difficulty struggled back to her home port; another of the ships leaking badly, reached

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Lisbon for repairs. One ship alone weathered the storm without mishap and continued on her way. But she too was doomed to disaster. Just as she had nearly completed her long voyage, another great gale came up from the south. For many hours the ship battled with wind and sea, until in the darkness of the night she was driven on the long reef of the Island of Mystery, where she was broken in pieces in the raging surf. All the people perished. One alone was washed ashore, unconscious but still living. She was the wife of the ship's surgeon.

IT HAPPENED that at that time the Island was the hiding place of pirates and wreckers who thrived by plundering the valuable cargoes that were washed ashore from shattered ships and by killing and robbing the surviving sailors and passengers. Two of these cruel sea-robbers found the woman lying unconscious on the sand where the landward-racing seas had cast her. On the third finger of her left hand she wore a valuable ring, which, believing her dead, they tried to remove. But her hand was so swollen by the salt water that the ring would not come off. Thereupon, in their stealthy haste, the wreckers cut off the finger on which the ring was bound. But while they were about it, the woman's senses returned, and the robbers, after the usual fashion of pirates, believing that "the dead tell no tales" killed her where she lay, and buried her body in the dunes, her loose white gown being her only shroud. Some months later, a ship was sent to the Island to try to find traces of the lost craft and to recover what they could find of her valuable cargo. But this investigating ship was wrecked and nearly all on board were drowned on the treacherous sand-bars of the Island. The survivors buried in one grave in the dunes the bodies of the dead that floated ashore from the broken ship.

TRADITION says that one day a surviving sailor, leaving his comrades behind in their rude shelter, went out alone to explore the Island. At twilight he came to a hut that had rockets in it, and some food, and furniture saved from wrecked ships. These had been placed there by the Government to aid distressed people, and there were printed instructions telling shipwrecked people what to do to keep themselves alive until they could be rescued. He made a fire and cooked a frugal meal; then after making up a cot he went out to walk in the moonlight on the fringe of the desolate sea before going to sleep. When he opened the

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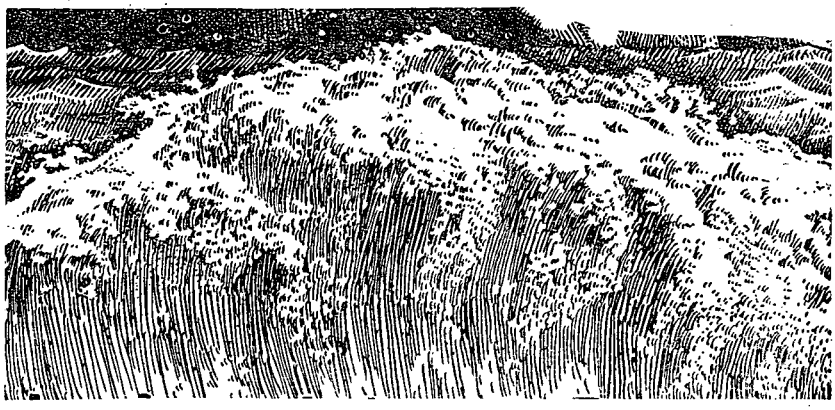
door on his return to the hut, he saw inside sitting by the fire, a lady clad in a long white robe; her long hair hung over her shoulders; her hair and gown were dripping wet, as if she had just come out of the sea, "Who are you," asked the sailor, "and why are you here?" But the woman made no reply. She held up her left hand from which, he saw, one of the fingers had been cut off; he noticed too that the wound was still bleeding. He opened the medicine case, with which the hut was equipped, to find a bandage for the wound, but while he was about it, the woman went out into the night. He followed, calling to her to stop, but she went on, so fast that he could not keep up with her—until she reached the water's edge and disappeared like mist in the sea.

Wondering much at the strange sight, the sailor returned to the hut, and there, to his surprise, was the woman again by the fire. Again she held up her mutilated hand with its missing finger. Looking at her closely, he thought he recognized her features. "Are you not the wife of the surgeon on the ship the wreck of which we are investigating?" he asked. She nodded in reply, and again held up her left hand, showing the bloody stump of her severed finger. He understood what she meant, and he asked, "Were you murdered here by wreckers for your ring?" She bowed her head again, but did not speak. The sailor promised to try to find her ring and to restore it to her family, and if possible to find and punish her murderers. She bowed her head again, and motioning him to move aside, she slipped away. He went behind her to the door, but she held up both hands as if to push him back. He fol-



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lowed her no farther, but from the doorway of the hut he watched her glide to the reef as she had done before and disappear in the mist. During the remainder of his stay on the Island she appeared to him no more.

True to his vow, the sailor learned the identity of three of the leading wreckers, and when he returned home to Canada he tried to find them. After much effort he tracked one of them to his home but the man was away in the far north. For some days the sailor remained in the wrecker's home, awaiting his return. One day the man's daughter spoke with admiration of the ring the sailor was wearing, but she said it was not so valuable as one that her father had found on the hand of a drowned woman on a far-distant island, and that he had left for sale with a jeweller in a nearby city. The sailor went to the city, and there in a jeweller's shop he found the ring. He bought it for a trifling sum. It was identified by the dead woman's friends as the ring she had long worn, and it was returned to her family in her old English home. A few days later, the wandering sailor went back to duty on his ship. The wrecker who had slain the woman was never brought to justice.

BUT the White-robed Lady with the missing finger did not entirely vanish. She is still seen by sailors on the Island of Mystery. Always before a storm, —perhaps as a reward or in gratitude for the shipwrecked sailor's—fidelity to his promise to recover her ring—she appears upon the beach. There, in the calm before the tempest, against the gray sand dunes, sailors still see the phantom of the pale lady in her loose white gown, her long hair waving in the wind, one hand extended as if claiming her ring, the other hand pointing to the sea. Then they know that a storm is not far away and that her presence is a warning of its terrors.

FOR safety purposes, the Island is now equipped with the best protective appliances known to man. These make the possibility of disaster almost negligible: But with all these scientific devices that guard against wreckage on the reefs, old-time sailors speak with mingled awe and gratitude and respect of the weird phantoms of the past that warned them of danger and in those warnings they had unswerving faith. And they believe that the wraiths of olden days still linger in the Isle of Mystery.

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Who dares the vengeance of the gods—emperor or barbarian?

BY EANDO BINDER

IT WAS late in the fall. Over the shadow-engulfed waters of the Tiber a raw wind blew down from the north. A cold white moon swung over the Seven Hills, riding half submerged through a bank of heavy black clouds.

A guard, standing before the portals of a secluded villa, drew his long cloak, cursed his metallic accoutrements that seemed to absorb thricefold the chill of the night. Crouching closer into the small cubicle hewn into the marble of the wall beside the entrance, teeth chattering, he wondered if it were not better to be up north fighting the barbarians. True, there the cold was yet more intense, but one could warm his blood in the heat of battle, and

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not stand like this, silently, like an evil spirit of the night, freezing and shivering.

As he stood there holding his great spear in cloak-muffled hands, the moon broke for a short spell through the dense clouds and momentarily illuminated the park-like expanse before him. Suddenly a shadow detached itself from a blotch of blackness cast by a group of poplars, and slithered toward him. Tago Titus flung aside his cloak and took firmer grip of the spear. His Emperor, Caligula Caesar, was within, and it was his duty to see that no enemy, or evil thing of the night, should pass beyond the entrance.

Closer and closer came the moving shadow. The fitful light of the moon made it appear as if an ugly portion of the black wraith above had been cast to earth. With appendages like beating wings, it seemed not human as it floated toward him over the shadowy lawn. Brave Titus of the Roman legions fought off a momentary awesome fear, and, forgetting the cold, stepped forth to battle this gruesome, unearthly thing. It was nearly upon him as he leveled his great spear.

"Who goes there?" he challenged with a throaty rasp.

The shadow stopped as if surprised to find opposition to its approach. The guard heaved a sigh of relief, for now he saw it was human after all. Anything earthly a Legionary could fight. He called his challenge again, this time with a more confident ring in his voice.

"It is I, Junga of the Huns," came a hoarse voice from the head-folds of the cloak worn by the newcomer. At the same time the concealing cloth was withdrawn somewhat to reveal a visage of extreme ugliness. The swarthy, parched skin was drawn tightly over the bones. It was like the face ofa mumified corpse.

"Bah—a barbarian!" rumbled the guard, angered because of his own superstitious fears. "Away with you, Hun! You have no business here."

"But I seek audience with the Emperor!" the trespasser remonstrated, not retreating a step.

Titus' lips curled scornfully. "Caligula Caesar does not give audience to every heathen from the north. Have you some talisman, some mark or sign of the Caesar's favor?"

"Nay, that I have not."

"Then you can not enter these portals!"

"But I say that Caesar—"

The guard Titus wasted no further words. It was not the custom in that time to listen to audacious persons of no authority. His huge hands showed white knuckles as he raised his spear to transfix the unlucky person before him. As he was about to deal the death blow,

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a voice spoke over his shoulder, staying his hand.

"Tago, hold your thrust. It is the Caesar's wish to speak to the barbarian."

Titus froze to attention as the voice from behind continued: "Know you not the chamber of spotless white marble within these walls? Perhaps"—here the voice became a whisper—"this newcomer would like to see it!"

The guard trembled. Well he knew of that chamber. Many were the nights he had heard the shrieks of the tortured and dying within its confines, despite the thickness of the marble walls. The voice that had spoken was that of Caligula, the wanton butcher, whom all Rome feared and hated. Here at this seemingly peaceful villa the mad Caesar held nightly debauches so cruel and vicious as to bring shame to his high office. It was whispered that Caligula was the nether-world spirit in the guise of man.

"See that he has no weapons, Tago."

The guard did as his master commanded and stepped aside, having found the barbarian unarmed.

"Come," Caligula spoke, a note of suppressed satisfaction in his voice.

Junga the Hun hesitated not a whit. With an alacrity that astounded the guard, he followed his unholy host. But he slowed and turned his head momentarily. "Wretched man!" he snarled at the Legionary "You raised your spear against my life this night. I shall not soon forget." Then he followed the Emperor, having lost but a few steps by the pause.

WITH Caligula in the lead, they passed through an anteroom in which a half-dozen guards stood as though carven into the marble walls about them, and thence into a sumptuous audience chamber. The Emperor made his way to a silk-carpeted dais and seated himself upon a throne-like chair of exquisite ivory workmanship.

The barbarian fell to his knees to await the Caesar's command to speak, but his sharp black eyes bored unflinchingly into the narrowed eyes of the other. He looked upon the face that could smile at a victim's screams of tortured agony, and there was no hint of fear in his manner. Caligula was impressed despite himself.

"Either you are a great fool," spoke the man on the throne, "or you have a silly courage without reason. To attempt entrance to my villa at night is the height of folly. Only by chance I passed the gate during a midnight stroll, and stayed my faithful guard's hand. Furthermore, your people, the Huns, have always been Rome's bitterest enemies. Speak!

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I will hear a word from you before I take your life."

The ragged clothes of the stranger shook convulsively for a moment, and then the Hun rose slowly to his feet. "You Romans speak of death and bloodshed as if they were nothing. Yet tonight is not my time to die."

"If I command it, you die!" said Caligula, whitening in sudden anger.

"Ah, Caesar, Master of the World, I come first because I fear not death, and secondly because I have been commanded hither by the Sorceress of Belshewawar.

" 'Go,' " said her High Priest to me, " 'go to the south where there is one whose destiny has been written within the Holy Circle. Through you and your priestly knowledge of our secret powers shall he know of Rome's greatest hour.' These were the words spoken to me, and I have come, Caesar."

Caligula stared at the unflinching black eyes of the barbarian as though seeking to read his mind and soul. "Rome's greatest hour?" He repeated the words almost involuntarily, mystified at their suggestive rhythm. Prompted by a desire to call the wretch before him a wily liar, he yet withheld the words. He was known to have openly sneered at the impotent gods of Rome, but at heart his bloody soul quaked before powers which were reputed to sway the destiny of human life.

Junga the Hun smiled inwardly. He could read the human face like a well-lettered book. Furthermore, there was something else that gave him secret amusement. Caligula had saved his life! Yet had he (Junga) but spoken one word out there by the gate, before the spear was thrown —a powerful sorcery would have seized the guard and rendered him helpless. And that same witchcraft could be used against even an emperor. . . .

"Do you think, barbarian dog," the Emperor broke the silence, "that I, Caesar of Rome, would forsake the gods of Rome?"

"Ah, Caesar, this is not a religious rite, but a strange power discovered by the Sorceress of Belshewawar that is beyond the knowledge of other men's minds. You can keep your gods. Take my life if you will, too, but I say to you that your destiny of knowing 'Rome's greatest hour' shall then die with me!"

The barbarian's beady eyes gleamed strangely. Caligula sat long in silent thought. The stranger's utter fearlessness and the tremendous portent of his words meant much to the Roman's superstitious nature.

"Have you proof, Priest of Belshewawar?" Already he addressed him respectfully and

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Junga was not slow to see his victory.

"That I have," "Junga spoke confidently.

"Lie not to me, Junga, or your body shall know pain no speaking tongue could describe. I have half a mind yet to take you to the White Chamber and wring the truth from your lips."

"If it please you, Caesar, take me there now. Such a chamber, I think, will suit me better than any other!"

Caligula started to his feet in astonishment. Then, with a sudden gesture, he led the way out of the room.

THE White Chamber was vaulted and of massive proportions. It was the private sanctum of one of Rome's most heartless kings. On its snow-white marble floor human blood had splashed too often, and its walls had echoed the groans of hellish agonies of torture. Tribune and slave, general and soldier, mistress and harlot, all had seen the dazzling whiteness only as a mock to their horrible death.

Scrubbed daily by slaves, the floor glistened like new-fallen snow in the dancing light of suspended lamps. One not knowing its ghastly history would think the chamber suited for some fair princess, with its priceless statuettes and costly furniture tastefully distributed around the room. But the whole central portion had been reserved for instruments of torture — shuddery things of steel and bronze that contrasted horribly with the other fittings.

Junga the Hun surveyed the chamber without comment, while Caligula watched him surreptitiously, marveling that he had not even blanched at the sight of the machines of torture. The stranger nodded as though he found the chamber suited to his bizarre purpose.

"August Caesar, at the break of dawn I must have the best mosaic-worker in Rome. And before the noon sun shines upon the Tiber, the Magic Circle of Belshewawar shall be completed here upon this marble floor. Then will I show you I spoke not vain words, and will prove to you the power of the priests of Belshewawar, of whom I am one."

"It shall be done, Junga." The mad Caesar gloated, for already he believed. His weak, cruel mind had a new toy for its amusement.

IT WAS shortly after the noon repast that a slave announced to the Emperor that all was in readiness in the White Chamber. Glutted with food and reeking from the fumes of overmuch wine, Caligula strode on sandaled feet across the marble floor.

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Junga the Hun was not now the ragged barbarian of the night before. Attired in the villa's best choice of costly garments, he might have passed as one of the Roman nobility, except for the alien cast of his yellow, sharp-featured visage. He genuflected before the Caesar with a smirk that Caligula might have seen if he had had less wine to befuddle his eyes.

"Master of the World!" spoke Junga as the Emperor seated himself on a silken couch. "See there the two posts with bolted shackles so that a man in them stands with legs and arms stretched to the limit. Before them notice the mosaic upon the marble floor in the form of a circle. That is the Holy Circle — yea, the Magic Circle—of Belshewawar, whose designs and symbols only a priest of our cult can read and interpret."

"Ah, then you need a victim!" cried the Roman joyfully.

"That I do, Caesar. Where formerly human blood was wasted, I shall show you how it can be put to good advantage, enabling me to see many things hidden to ordinary eyes, and even to foretell the future. Through its powers I will bring you—'Rome's greatest hour!' "

Again that strangely suggestive phrase, and, despite the barbarian's bluntness in speaking of his wanton butchery, Caligula's head came up an expectantly. He mused silently over its cryptical meaning for a moment.

"What sort of man do you want?" asked the Emperor finally. "Or, if you will—woman!" he added evilly.

"I have already chosen a victim," said Junga quickly. "One called Tago Titus."

The Roman clenched his fist and for a moment resentment stormed over his face. "Tago Titus is a trusted and faithful guard and knows well his duties. Choose another."

"There are a thousand such as Titus in the Roman Legions," returned the barbarian coolly. "You are Master of the World. All men's lives belong to you. Your guard Titus is my choice."

Caligula licked his lips in indecision, and for the first time Junga the Hun showed a sign of perturbation. His withered skin paled so that he resembled more than ever a living corpse. But in the battle of wills, the barbarian won, and with a clap of his hands the Emperor summoned a slave. He was given orders, and a short time later the unfortunate Legionary was dragged in, stripped naked. Brutal attendants of the White Chamber, long calloused to the distasteful work, shackled the former guard to the two posts facing the circle of strange mosaic patterns. The hapless victim seemed resigned to his fate,

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but seeing the Hun resplendent in a costly toga, leering at him, he burst into speech:

"Heathen snake, this is your doing! May the gods of Rome curse—"

"Silence!" thundered the Emperor.

"My blood upon you both; may destiny bring you with me soon and—"

"Silence!" roared Caligula again. The Legionary set his jaw firmly and relapsed into silence, but his eyes glared accusingly at his master. "You are sentenced to death," went on Caligula coldly, "because you nearly took the life of this man Junga, when my previous instructions had been to conduct him into the portals when he arrived."

Titus' eyes flared dumfoundedly, and then lowered in resignation. The Caesar's word was law—and truth. Then Caligula tossed his head, and all left the chamber except Junga.

In the appalling silence that followed, broken only by the heavy breathing of the victim, Junga drew a sharp dagger from his girdle and approached the shackled man. The leer of triumph on his mummified face made the Roman soldier wince, though he had been unperturbed at sight of the shining blade.

His face close to that of the soldier ,the barbarian hissed softly like a venomous snake: "So you insulted me, and threatened my life! You see now—" He jerked back with an oath, wiping from his face the material scorn of the man he had brought to his doom.

"Come, let us get on with this," commanded Caligula, who had watched impatiently.

Junga waited no longer, but plunged his dagger into the bowels of the naked man, making a circle so swiftly that it was etched in a fine red line before the entrails burst forth from the body. The barbarian had leaped aside to escape being spattered with blood, and he glided like an evil wraith to the side of the seated Emperor.

With a groan of intense pain, the Legionary's head fell upon his chest. He gritted his teeth and not another sound came from his lips.

"Look, Caesar!" cried the priest of Belshewawar solemnly. "Look! The shadow of blood creeps toward the Magic Circle! When it reaches the mystic symbols and flows around them, I shall read what portends of importance in the empire." He pointed a scrawny finger at the huge-patterned ring on the snowy marble floor.

CALIGULA looked alternately at the creeping blood and the mosaic of intricate and mysterious figures. There were the age-old

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symbols of the planets and stars, interspersed with crude outlines of human beings, and the writhing shapes of cabalistic signs. Wavy lines ran through and about the area, connecting one to another with great complexity.

Long the two waited, while the miserable victim prayed silently for a quick death. Gradually the shadow of blood, a darkly red reflection from the vaulted ceiling above, crept on its way to the Holy Circle. Two heartless pairs of eyes followed the moving red reflections, unmindful of the tortured man waiting for an end to his death-agony, and of the revolting mess at his feet, from which flowed the scarlet stain that filled the chamber with a fearful ruby glow.

Suddenly Junga leaped from his perch beside the Caesar's couch. The long crimson shadow of blood of the mosaic's intricate pattern began to form a gruesome design. The barbarian knelt down beside the circle. After minutes of silent contemplation, he arose with a look of intense excitement on his face, and cried: "Look, Caesar, and mark my words well. The Magic Circle has brought you great news. It tells that the Roman Legions in the north have won a great victory against the barbarians, and the frontiers of the empire are secure. Oh, Caesar, thus speaks the Magic Circle of Belshewawar!" And Junga the oracle sank with his face upon the marble floor in proper respect for the man before him.

Caligula sat in silence, speechless. At the words of the other his hands had gripped the arms of the chair until the knuckles glared white. News of such magnitude and importance astounded him. For many days he had worried over the matter, for the Legions of Rome had been beaten back time and time again until it seemed the very frontiers of the empire must succumb before the barbarians. He had shifted generals and military leaders ceaselessly in an effort to find one who might turn the long and doubtful campaign into victory.

The Emperor leaped to his feet, both anger and a mad joy intermingled on his face. Pointing a long finger at the sorcerer, he shouted loudly: "Priest of Belshewawar, you have spoken. This shall prove to me the truth or untruth of your supposed powers. In a few days there will come a courier from the north. If he had other tidings than yours for my ears, your doom is sealed. I shall then know you for a liar."

Caligula strode from the chamber.

Junga, still kneeling on the floor, fairly laughed to himself. His schemes had been crowned with utter success. An adept in the dark art of anthropomancy,

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he had come to the key city of the world to make use of his evil profession. It had struck him, while pursuing an obscure life as a much-feared sorcerer in a barbaric land, that his powers entitled him to greater honor and fame. He had come to the Caesar, therewith, intent upon advancing his own interests. The Sorceress of Belshewawar, supposedly his patroness, was but the figure of an impressive myth. Junga had come of his own will.

And how well it had all gone! He had taken a great risk, facing the mad butcher of Rome in his own stronghold and speaking to his own face of his atrocities. But he had cunningly played on the depraved instincts of the Emperor, knowing that would overshadow any audacity on his part.

JUNGA rose to his feet. Already engrossed with plans for a glorious future as Caligula's honored soothsayer, he straightened the folds of his toga and stepped toward the doorway. But a low sound brought him to pause, startled. It had been Titus, the guard, moaning in his death-agony. The barbarian glanced at his mutilated victim, shrugged disdainfully, and made for the doorway, suddenly aware of the stench of freshly spilled blood.

"Junga! Junga of the Huns!"

The barbarian stopped and turned half fearfully in his victim's direction. Titus, with the shadows of death in his eyes, had raised his head from his chest. Those eyes, sharp and accusing, focused till they met those of the heartless man of the north.

"Junga of the Huns! Do you hear me?"

Perspiration started from the sorcerer's forehead and he tried to break away from the sudden spell that seemed to have bound his feet—tried to escape the accusing tones of the agony-ridden voice of the man he had murdered.

"You have done evil, Junga," came from the pain-twisted lips of the dying Roman. Soft though the tones were, the words rang through the vaulted room like funeral chimes. "Your evil shall live after you—but before that it shall compass your own doom!"

The barbarian stared speechless in terror and saw the eyes of the suffering man turn to the mosaic ring between them. What could he be seeing there? Why did those eyes, swiftly glazing in the mists of death, light up as though having seen something in the configurations on the marble floor?

"Look!"

The word came almost sharply from the disemboweled victim. "My blood—see? It seeps into the Holy Circle. It is forming a design—a portent of the future. I, too, can read that sign! It says

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—that you—fiendish slayer of—innocent men are—warned of your black gods—that you—Caligula—doom—"

The agonized voice ceased and the great head of Titus the Legionary dropped to his chest. Junga the Hun fled from the room with hands to his ears, vainly trying to shut from them the words he had heard.

IT HAD happened that several days before, there had come to the ears of Caligula the tale of a ravishingly beautiful female captive of Egypt, who was in the hands of one of his generals in Rome. He had forthwith decided to see her and perhaps take her for his own. The fair creature was brought to his villa, and by chance, it fell upon the day after the courier from the north, coming with news of victory for Rome, vindicated the sorcery of Junga.

The northern wizard saw the coming of her litter from the window of his room. Attracted by her manner and poise even from that distance, as she stepped gracefully from the vehicle in the courtyard, Junga contrived to be in the hall as the retinue conducted her to the presence of the Emperor. Stunned by her beauty, so perfect in contrast to the gnarled, unshapely women of his own hardy, northern race, Junga silently vowed then and there that Caligula should not have her, but he himself. Already he counted himself an authority in the villa, to whom nothing was impossible. Knowing he must work fast if he would be the first to have her, as was his fierce desire from the moment he saw her, the barbarian dispatched a slave to the Caesar with a message.

An hour later, in the early evening, a summons called him to the Emperor's reception room, but not before Junga had seen the beautiful slave conducted to the guarded quarters in the rear of the villa where Caligula's loves of the day were kept in luxury and idleness.

Junga bowed low before the Caesar, who gave him permission to speak. "August Caesar, we must again watch the shadows of blood creep over the lineaments of the Holy Circle of Belshewawar. But an hour ago in my room there came to me a message borne by certain spirits from my patroness, saying we must read the first of the portents that shall bring you knowledge of 'Rome's greatest hour'."

"So be it," said Caligula. "Tomorrow evening—"

"Nay, but it must be this very evening," cut in Junga softly.

Caligula waved an imperious hand. "Tomorrow evening, I say. I have just laid eyes upon the most beautiful creature ever to

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draw breath in the land of Egypt, and tonight—"

"And tonight," again interrupted Junga, "must you forgo your carnal pleasure to hear the prophecies of Belshewawar."

Caligula leaped to his feet angrily. "But it is my will," he fairly roared, "that tonight the fair Egyptian—"

"And who knows—the Holy Circle of Belshewawar may have something to say about this most gorgeous captive? It is best, Caesar, that you listen to the wisdom of the sorceress who sent me, before you do in folly those things you contemplate without regard to the future."

The firm quiet voice of the barbarian, delivered in sepulchral tones, played upon the superstitions of the Emperor. As a result, later in the evening, they again met in the White Chamber.

The same gruesome rite that had taken place a week before was enacted, the victim a guard accused of having fallen asleep on watch. Not quite as stoical as his predecessor, this man screamed aloud as the plunging knife searched his vitals. His powerful body writhed and knotted in the grip of the gyves, and each throb of agony brought piteous groans to his lips.

But the two archfiends who had brought him to that ghastly end showed little interest or compassion to his suffering, except that Caligula turned scornful eyes upon him and said that most men died with far more pain in the infamous White Chamber. The Caesar then turned his undivided attention to the reflection from the vaults above that slowly crept upon the Magic Circle of Belshewawar.

Apparently in a semi-trance while deciphering the symbols of the mosaic, Junga the Hun, mumbling in a strange cadence, stared with beady eyes at the mystic signs, and suddenly leaped to his feet.

"Alas, Caesar! It is not always that the Holy Circle tells that which the heart desires. For it reveals now that you should not have this fair creature from the south!"

Caligula rose from his couch, enraged. "Do you dare to command a Caesar what and not to crave? By the throne of Jove, you go too far. I will have the Egyptian girl, whatever your Holy Circle says."

As Junga stood silent and arrogant in his total lack of fear at Caesar's mighty wrath, Caligula calmed down, asking "And why, Priest of Belshewawar, must I deny myself the possession of a mere woman?"

"Harken, Caesar," answered Junga quietly. "The Egyptian maid you so desire, the magic of Belshewawar tells me, is tainted —tainted with leprosy!"

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Caligula turned ashy and fairly staggered back to his seat. The barbarian continued, his eyes narrowing craftily. "No one knows it, as the disease is in that stage where outward signs are hardly detectable, but none the less, it is there. If you will dispatch your physician to her to conduct a close examination, he will confirm my prediction."

The Emperor nodded, too stunned to speak and they parted.

A CLOSELY muffled figure stood in the shadow of a tethering-post in the courtyard, nervous and impatient. At times it peered carefully beyond the post where the moonlight flooded the flagstones, and as often it would turn its head backward where a darker shadow seemed inked into the gloom-ridden corner beside the little-used stable entrance of the villa.

Suddenly a second figure stirred in the shadows along the one wall, and resolved itself into a man swathed from head to feet in a faded toga and tattered woolen scarf. The watcher melted to the side of the concealing post and waited silently.

"Hsst! Bogamus! Are you there? It is I, Junga!"

The watcher thereupon stepped from the shadow. "Be quiet, on your life! This is business that calls for more care than daring."

Junga the Hun, for it was he in the nondescript clothing, grunted softly, it may have been in derision or acquiescence, and came close to the other. "And the—our merchandise, it is here all right?"

Bogamus the physician pointed to the impenetrable darkness of the stable corner and nodded. "That which you wish is there; but by the gods, now I wish—"

"Wish what, Bogamus?"

"—that I had not agreed to it. Caligula is a wicked man, a devil when wrathful."

"But he is stupid," Junga said quickly. "Fear not, Bogamus; none but you and I know that the Egyptian girl is untainted and pure. Only we two shall know that she is yet here at the villa, accessible to me. Tomorrow Caligula shall see a veiled woman hurried from the villa to be exiled from human society. He will quickly forget the matter when the captain of the guards reports she is gone from this place."

Bogamus shook his head, worried and frowning. "But only the gods can save us if someone be suspicious and raise the veil to find another woman in the Egyptian's place."

"What brave man will touch the veil of a leper?" Junga's voice reflected great confidence. "But come, we waste good time in idle talk. Lead the way to my rooms. I shall carry the—merchandise."

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Bogamus in the lead, Junga staggering behind with the limp and bound figure of a girl in his arms, they passed via the stable entrance into a dark corridor that led upward on ramps of sturdy wood. It being the hour before dawn, the villa was silent in sleep and there was none to question the two wary evil-doers.

In the week that Junga had been at the villa, he had already cast his eyes upon the various people in the Caesar's service, with the possibility of contacting some of them as helpers in his nefarious operations. Bogamus the physician, gaunt and avaricious, he had quickly gathered to his evil fold with the promise of that lure that knows no honesty —gold.

Finally a stray candle-beam lighted their feet as they gained the living-quarters of the villa, and Bogamus parted from the barbarian after seeing him safely in his rooms. Junga the Hun laid the unconscious, drugged girl on a couch, and strode to the doorway. After listening for long minutes in the utter silence, and assured that no one had detected him and followed, he closed the door, shot home its bolt, and turned to the girl lying pale and alluring in the flicker of the candle. In his face grew a concentrated lust that transformed his natural ugliness into utter bestiality.

IN THE week that followed, Junga and Caligula forgathered three times in the White Chamber, staining the marble floor each time with the blood of innocent men, doomed by command of the Caesar. The Priest of Belshewawar, skilled in his art, read from the Magic Circle omens and portents that related mainly to Caligula's northern operations in extending the empire. The mad Caesar, engrossed in his superstition, became convinced that the magic of the barbarian sorcerer would eventually lead him to "Rome's greatest hour."

Junga, in turn, knew there was to be no such fantastic climax in their relationship; it was his purpose merely to lead the trusting Emperor on, and make his favor secure. But one thing bothered the cunning man of magic: try as he would he could not forget those fateful words Titus the Legionary had said with his dying breath. Had the revelations of his dark magic been able to open his eyes to his own future, the barbarian would have been yet more disturbed. . . .

It was not many days later a guard came to Caligula with a strange tale of what he had glimpsed in a window of Junga's private quarters. The guard had been a close friend of the deceased Titus, and had gained his information more by design than

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accident. The daring fellow had climbed, at risk of life and limb, to the only vantage-point, high on a peaked gable, from which one could see into the chambers of the sorcerer. It had been well worth the while, for the information he imparted startled the Emperor not a little. Caligula spent an hour in deep thought, his black brows furrowed in a thunderous scowl. Then he called to him a trusted steward, to whom he gave certain whispered instructions, enjoining him to secrecy.

That very night Caligula himself repaired to the White Chamber, and not long afterward the door opened to reveal two of his attendants carrying between them the struggling form of Bogamus the physician. The attendants stood him on his feet before the couch of the Caesar and stepped back a pace with brawny arms folded.

Trembling in every limb, Bogamus attempted to put on a righteous front before the Emperor's accusing eye. "Hail, August Caesar! For what reason am I, your faithful physician, thus dragged to the—White Chamber? I told these rough fellows they had made a mistake. Will the Caesar give me permission to leave?"

"I would talk with you, Bogamus," Caligula said, transfixing the terror-stricken man with ominous eyes. "Some ten days ago there was brought to this villa a captive Egyptian maid. You remember?"

"Yes, Caesar."

Caligula said nothing for a long moment. Then: "Where is she now?" he suddenly shot out.

Bogamus, licking dry lips, answered as confidently as his shaken nerves would allow: "If you will but recall, Caesar, she was tainted with leprosy and by your own orders exiled from this place."

Caligula arched his heavy brows and straightened a sleeve of his tunic. "That is your story, Bogamus?"

"Y-yes, August Caesar."

Suddenly, at a wave of the Emporer's hand, the two stalwarts grasped the physician by the arms, and unmindful of his sudden shriek, dragged him off his feet and carried him away from the couch. With practiced familiarity they strapped him by wrists and ankles to an apparatus gleaming with much metal. Bogamus came out of a momentary faint to find himself suspended horizontally four feet off the floor. Unable to see underneath himself, his mind sickened at the thought of what devilish instrument might be there. His eyes focused then on the leering, insane face of Caligula and he cried loudly for mercy.

"Strip him!"

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The mad Emporer strode to a position where he could peer into the drawn and frightened face of his erstwhile trusted physician.

"Bogamus, you have lied to me and deceived me. The fair Egyptian was not taken from this place! She had been observed in the chamber of another supposedly faithful servant of mine. Now tell me, traitor, was the girl tainted with leprosy or not?"

"No, no!" cried the now naked and trembling man. "It was but a trick. Release me, and I will tell you all! You do not have to torture me! I will tell all!"

"You will tell all now, Bogamus," grated the Emperor, with a great anger clouding his face. "Who incited you to play this deception?"

The physician rolled his eyes fearfully, unable to see any way of not being revealed a traitor and double traitor. "Junga! Junga the Hun! He wanted the fair Egyptian. He plotted to get her. In his cunning and lust, he came to me. He cast a spell over me. I swear it, Caesar, he played his magic on me. Never of myself would I have—it was Junga—he—not I—"

His suspicions suddenly confirmed, the boiling wrath of the mad Caesar exploded. With a roar of violent curses, he turned from the babbling physician and his incoherent pleas for mercy and forgiveness, and jerked a finger at his minions.

Without a word one of the slaves stooped beside a large wooden wheel whose outer edge, strewn with a score of jagged-edged knives, revolved beneath the unprotected spine of the doomed man. Grasping the crank handle with which it was equipped, he slowly turned it. Its axle uncentered, the wheel's larger arc reared from the floor and swung its freight of knives upward.

Bogamus the physician screamed in sudden pain as a knife flicked his flesh underneath, and arched his body desperately so that the next revolution of the wheel left him untouched. The attendant methodically turned the crank, and Caligula looked on in vengeful gloating, knowing that in a short time the straining man would have no further strength to arch his back and then he would sag, so that the knives—

Two hours later the mad Caesar left the White Chamber as the last echoes of screams and groans had died away.

SITTING resplendent before a table loaded with delicious foods and rare wines in the vaulted White Chamber, Caligula Caesar drummed his fingers on the arms of the chair. At times his cruel face lighted with a smile of anticipation.

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It was apparent that he awaited someone, and at last the door swung aside and two guards ushered in Junga, the Priest of Belshewawar, sumptuously clothed in contrast to the corpse-like lineaments of his face. The attendants retreated at a signal from their master, and Junga stood a moment hesitant, surprised at the sight of food and drink in such a place.

"Come, my Junga," cried Caligula jovially. "This night shall we dine in our citadel of sport. I have for our rites tonight a victim whose heart's blood shall surely tell when and how Rome shall know its greatest hour. Come, a grateful Caesar invites you to dine with him!"

Unsuspecting, the barbarian sorcerer came forward, and upon his parched and wrinkled skin a smile of satisfaction grew. To dine with a Caesar! This honor had not yet been his.

Caligula raised a goblet of wine as Junga seated himself. "This is the choicest vintage of the Carduc Hills. Drink, my incomparable soothsayer, and the toast—to what the Holy Circle will this night reveal."

Junga started in suspicion at this, and darted a quick glance at the Emperor. But seeing the Caesar's goblet already upraised, a veritable royal command to drink, he drew up his own goblet and drank deep of it. A moment later a cry escaped from his lips. His arms fell helpless to his side and the golden goblet crashed to the floor to taint with its dark red wine the snow-white purity.

The color drained from his swarthy face so that he looked like an actual corpse, a dead man sitting in a chair with living eyes—eyes that glared a confusion of emotions: hatred, rage, and above all, a horrible fear. His voice, as if from the grave, croaked: "You have poisoned me!"

"By the crown of Olympus, but the Priest of Belshewawar has again guessed the truth. What evil magic gives you this strange power?" Caligula's voice hissed mockingly as he burst into a spasm of triumphant laughter. Then his face became stern and he shook a clenched fist in the barbarian's face. "A rare poison that robs men of their strength, and sorcerers of their supernatural powers. Weave a spell if you can," he taunted, "and you shall find it dying unborn in your own treacherous heart."

Clapping his hands, Caligula arose as the two attendants came running up, and ordered them to shackle the barbarian to the gyve-posts before the Holy Circle of Belshewawar. As quickly as they had come, the slaves left, and Caligula faced the horror-stricken eyes of Junga.

"But five people knew that you have made a fool of Caesar,

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Three of them are gone already: Bogamus, the Egyptian maid and one of my guards. You and I—are left!"

With deliberate eagerness, the mad Emperor drew from his girdle a sharp dagger, while Junga stared speechless and powerless, for the poison was truly an antidote against witchcraft. "Look, Junga! There before you lies the mosaic ring whose mysterious convolutions and signs reveal great secrets when the shadows of human blood creep over them. What more fitting than that your blood should now be spilled for the purpose!"

"Who are you," croaked the voice of Junga suddenly, "that dare threaten the life of one of Belshewawar's priests? Beware, for the Sorceress who sent me here is jealous of her own."

Caligula drew back in awed fear, but only for a moment. "Bah! I have no dread of her power, for I am Master of the World, all-powerful and protected of the gods of Rome. Furthermore, will the Sorceress of Belshewawar avenge the death of a priest of her cult who has proved a traitor to his gods?"

With these words Caligula came closer to the doomed man, dagger extended, gloating at the intense fear that shone from his victim's anguished eyes. One quick motion and swing of the arm and Junga the Hun became as those others had been under his own ministrations.

Turning his back upon the man shrieking in agony, Caligula strode to his table and drained a goblet of wine. "You see, heathen and traitor, that although the poison robs you of motion and of your black skill in magic, it does not deaden the capacity for pain. Now let us watch the shadows of blood, and see what the Holy Circle will tell."

No longer a man, but a monster, the mad Caesar taunted the dying man, exacting vengeance for the trickery that had lost to him a beautiful woman. Caligula might have forgiven him the act had he been a Roman, and had he been a soothsayer of years of standing. But for a wretched barbarian to steal from the Caesar, within three weeks of being there, a desirable woman—that was unforgivable.

THE scarlet light that rebounded from the vaults above slanted gradually toward the mosaic ring from the pool of blood at Junga's feet. In an ecstasy of pain that groaning could not alleviate, Junga fell to silence except for labored, choking breath, and stared fixedly at the shadows of blood writhing over the symbols of the Magic Circle.

"I will read the meaning of the oracle of Belshewawar,"

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gleefully cried the Emperor of Rome. "There, it says Junga is a thief, one who thought to rob a Caesar. It says he has murdered innocent men, and despoiled a woman whose feet he was not worthy to kiss. And for these things, sorcerer though you are, death has been your lot. And what more does it say?" leered Caligula insanely. "It says that I, Caius Caligula Caesar, shall know 'Rome's greatest hour'—with your death!"

The barbarian's eyes flared wide suddenly. "That, Caesar of blood, is blasphemy against my gods!"

The words rang ominously through the vaulted White Chamber, and Junga fixed his eyes intently on the mosaic ring before his mutilated body. Seeing this, and shaken by those portentous words, Caligula felt an icy finger touch his heart. Almost he wished he had not tampered with the powers of Junga's alien gods. His eyes turned involuntarily to the Magic Circle, wondering what could be written there. Then he saw that there was something there—shadows that should not be. . . .

Caligula whirled and in that instant knew his doom. A dozen men with drawn swords and daggers were behind his back, their faces reflecting none of the reverence that should have been there for their Emperor. With cries of "murderer" and "wanton butcher" they rushed upon him, and before he could cry out, a dozen daggers plunged into his body. He fell mortally wounded as they rushed out again.

A silence as of the grave fell upon the White Chamber. The shackled barbarian sorcerer stared with wide eyes, forgetful of his great agony, for he had witnessed the assassination of a Roman Emperor.

A groan came from the wounded man, as he stirred his hacked body in a growing pool of blood. Weakly he raised his head. His eyes encountered those of the barbarian.

Junga's lips opened, and his voice, already vibrant with the rattle of death, came forth prophetically: "'Rome's greatest hour'—has come! For Caligula the mad, murdering Caesar, is no more!"

A harsh chuckle, ghostly with the tones of death, reverberated from the white marble walls as the shadows of blood slowly crept in deepening shades over a circle of strange mosaic patterns.

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. . . after all, it was no bargain.

THE CALAMANDER CHEST

BY JOSEPH PAYNE BRENNAN

"FROM the Indies it is, sir!" said the second-hand dealer, pressing his palms together. "Genuine calamander wood—a rare good buy it is, sir!"

"Well—I'll take it," replied Ernest Maax somewhat hesitantly.

He had been strolling rather idly through the antique and second-hand shop when the chest caught his attention. It had a rich, exotic look which pleased him. In appearance the dark brown, black-striped wood resembled ebony. And the chest

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was quite capacious. It was at least two feet wide and five feet long, with a depth of nearly three feet. When Maax learned that the dealer was willing to dispose of it for only twelve dollars, he could not resist buying it.

What made him hesitate a little was the dealer's initial low price and quite obvious pleasure upon completing the transaction. Was that fine-grained wood only an inlay, or did the chest contain some hidden defect?

When it was delivered to his room the next day, he could find nothing wrong with it. The calamander wood was solid and sound and the entire chest appeared to be in fine condition. The lid clicked smoothly into place when lowered, and the big iron key turned readily enough.

Feeling quite satisfied with himself, Maax carefully polished the dark wood and then slid the chest into an empty corner of his room. The next time he changed his lodgings, the chest would prove invaluable. Meanwhile it added just the right exotic touch to his rather drab chamber.

Several weeks passed, and although he still cast occasional admiring glances at his new possession, it gradually began to recede from his mind.

Then one evening his attention was returned to it in a very startling manner.

He was sitting up, reading, rather late in the evening, when for some reason his eyes lifted from his book and he looked across the room toward the corner where he had placed the chest.

A long white finger protruded from under its lid.

He sat motionless, overwhelmed with sudden horror, his eyes riveted on this appalling object.

It just hung there unmoving, a long pale finger with a heavy knuckle bone and a black nail.

After his first shock, Maax felt a slow rage kindling within him. The finger had no right to be there; it was unreasonable—and idiotic. He resented it bitterly, much as he would have resented the sudden intrusion of an unsavory roomer from down the hall. His peaceful, comfortable evening was ruined by this outrageous manifestation.

With an oath, he hurled his book straight at the finger.

It disappeared. At least he could no longer see it. Tilting his reading light so that its beams shot across the room, he strode to the chest and flung open the lid.

There was nothing inside.

Dropping the lid, he picked up his book and returned to the chair. Perhaps, he reflected, he had been reading too much lately.

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His eyes, in protest, might be playing tricks on him.

For some time longer he pretended to read, but at frequent intervals he slowly lifted his eyes and looked across the room toward the calamander chest. The finger did not reappear however, and eventually he went to bed.

A WEEK passed and he began to forget about the finger. He stayed out more during the evening, and read less, and by the end of a week he was quite convinced that he had been the victim of nothing more than an odd hallucination brought on by simple eye strain.

At length, at the beginning of the second week, deciding that his eyes had had a good rest, he bought some current magazines and made up his mind to spend the evening in his room.

Some time after he took up the first magazine, he glanced over at the chest and saw that all was as it should be. Settling comfortably in his chair, he became absorbed in the magazine and did not put it aside for over an hour. As he finally laid it down and prepared to pick up another, his eyes strayed in the direction of the chest—and there was the finger.

It hung there as before, motionless, with its thick knuckle and repulsive black nail.

Crowding down an impulse to rush across the room, Maax slowly reached over to a small table which stood near his chair and felt for a heavy metal ash tray. As his hand closed on the tray, his eyes never left the finger.

Rising very slowly, he began to inch across the room. He was certain that the ash tray, if wielded with force, would effectively crush anything less substantial than itself which it descended on. It was made of solid metal, and it possessed a sharp edge.

When he was a scant yard away from the chest, the finger disappeared. When he lifted the lid, the chest, as he had expected, was empty.

Feeling considerably shaken, he returned to his chair and sat down. Although the finger did not reappear, he could not drive its hideous image out of his mind. Before going to bed, he reluctantly decided that he would get rid of the chest.

He was in sound health and his eyes had had a week's rest. Therefore, he reasoned, whatever flaw in nature permitted the ugly manifestation rested not with him but with the chest itself.

Looking back, he recalled the second-hand dealer's eagerness to sell the chest at a ridiculously low price. The thing must already have had an evil reputation when the antique dealer acquired it. Knowing it, the unscrupulous

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merchant had readily consented to part with it for a small sum.

Maax, a practical young man, admitted the possibility of a non-physical explanation only with reluctance, but felt that he was not in a position to debate the matter. The preservation of stable nerves came first. All other considerations were secondary.

ACCORDINGLY, on the following day, before leaving for work, he arranged with his landlady to have the chest picked up and carted off to the city dump. He included specific directions that upon arrival it was to be burned.

When he arrived back at his room that evening however, the first thing that met his gaze was the calamander chest. Furious, he hurried down the hall to his landlady's apartment and demanded an explanation. Why had his orders been ignored?

When she was able to get a word in, the patient woman explained that the chest actually had been picked up and carted off to the dump. Upon arrival however, the man in charge of the dump had assured the men who lugged in the chest that there must be some mistake. Nobody in his right mind, he asserted, would destroy such a beautiful and expensive article. The men must have picked up the wrong one; surely there must be another left behind, he said, which was the worthless one the owner wanted discarded.

The two men who had taken the chest to the dump, not feeling secure in their own minds about the matter, and not wishing to make a costly mistake, had returned the chest later in the day.

Completely nonplussed by this information, Maax muttered an apology to the landlady and went back to his room, where he plopped into a chair and sat staring at the chest. He would, he finally decided, give it one more chance. If nothing further happened, he would keep it; otherwise he would take immediate and drastic measures to get rid of it once and for all.

Although he had planned to attend a concert that evening, it began to rain shortly after six o'clock and he resigned himself to an evening in his room.

Before starting to read, he locked the chest with the iron key and put the key in his pocket. It was absurd that he had not thought of doing so before. This would, he felt, be the decisive test.

While he read, he maintained a keen watch on the chest, but nothing happened until well after eleven, when he put aside his book for the evening.

As he closed the book and started to rise, he looked at the

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chest—and there was the finger. In appearance it was unchanged. Instead of hanging slack and motionless however, it now seemed to be imbued with faint life. It quivered slightly and it appeared to be making weak attempts to scratch the side of the chest with its long black nail.

When he finally summoned up sufficient courage, Maax took up the metal ash tray as before and crept across the room. This time he actually had the tray raised to strike before the finger vanished. It seemed to whisk back into the chest.

With a wildly thumping heart, Maax lifted the lid. Again the box was empty. But then he remembered the iron key in his pocket and a new thrill of horror coursed down his spine. The hideous digital apparition had unlocked the chest! Either that, or he was rapidly losing his sanity.

Completely unnerved, he locked the chest for a second time and then sat in a chair and watched it until two o'clock in the morning. At length, exhausted and deeply shaken, he sought his bed. Before putting out the light, he ascertained that the chest was still locked.

As soon as he fell asleep, he experienced a hideous nightmare. He dreamed that a persistent scratching sound woke him up, that he arose, lit a candle, and looked at the chest. The protruding finger showed just under the lid and this time it was galvanized with an excess of life. It twisted and turned, drummed with its thick knuckle, scratched frantically with its flat black nail. At length, as if it suddenly became aware of his presence, it became perfectly still—and then very deliberately beckoned for him to approach. Flooded with horror, he nevertheless found himself unable to disobey. Setting down the candle, he slowly crossed the room like an automaton. The monstrous beckoning finger drew him on like some infernal magnet which attracted human flesh instead of metal.

As he reached the chest, the finger darted inside and the lid immediately lifted. Overwhelmed with terror and yet utterly unable to stop himself, he stepped into the chest, sat down, drew his knees up to his chin and turned onto his side. A second later the lid slammed shut and he heard the iron key turn in the lock.

At this point in the nightmare he awoke with a ringing scream. He sat up in bed and felt the sweat of fear running down his face. In spite of his nightmare—or because of it—he dared not get up and switch on the light. Instead, he burrowed under the bed clothes and lay wide awake till morning.

After he had regained some

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measure of self-composure, he went out for black coffee and then, instead of reporting to his job, rode across town to the modest home of a truck driver and mover whom he had hired at various times in the past. After some quite detailed and specific plans had been agreed upon, he paid the mover ten dollars and departed with a promise to pay him an equal amount when the job was done. After lunch, considerably relieved, he went to work.

HE ENTERED his room that evening with a confident air, but as soon as he looked around, his heart sank. Contrary to instructions, the mover had not picked up the chest. It remained in the corner, just where it had been.

This time Maax was more depressed than angry. He sought out a telephone and called up the mover. The man was profusely apologetic. His truck had broken down, he explained, just as he was starting out to pick up the chest. The repairs were nearly completed however, and he would absolutely be out to carry off the chest the first thing in the morning.

Since there was nothing else he could do, Maax thanked him and hung up. Finding himself unusually reluctant to return to his room, he ate a leisurely dinner at a nearby restaurant and later attended a movie. After the movie he stopped and had a hot chocolate. It was nearly midnight before he got back to his room.

In spite of his nightmare of the previous evening, he found himself looking forward to bed. He had lost almost an entire night's sleep and he was beginning to feel the strain.

After assuring himself that the calamander chest was securely locked, he slipped the iron key under his pillow and got into bed. In spite of his uneasiness he soon fell asleep.

Some hours later he awoke suddenly and sat up. His heart was pounding. For a moment he was not aware of what had awakened him—then he heard it. A furious scratching, tapping, thumping sound came from one corner of the room.

Trembling violently, he got out of bed, crossed the room and pressed the button on his reading lamp. Nothing happened. Either the electricity was shut off, or the light bulb had burned out.

He pulled open a drawer of the lamp stand and frantically searched for a candle. By the time he found one and applied a match to its wick, the scratching sound had redoubled in intensity. The entire room seemed filled with it.

Shuddering, he lifted the candle and started across the

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room toward the calamander chest. As the wavering light of the candle flickered into the far corner, he saw the finger.

It protruded far out of the chest and it was writhing with furious life. It thrummed and twisted, dug at the chest with its horrible black nail, tapped and turned in an absolute frenzy of movement.

Suddenly, as he advanced, it became absolutely still. It hung down limp. Engulfed with terror, Maax was convinced that it had become aware of his approach and was now watching him.

When he was halfway across the room, the finger slowly lifted and deliberately beckoned to him. With a rush of renewed horror Maax remembered the ghastly events of his dream. Yet—as in the nightmare—he found himself utterly unable to disobey that diabolical summons. He continued on like a man in a trance. . . .

EARLY the next morning the mover and his assistant were let into Maax's room by the landlady. Maax had apparently already left for work, but there was no need of his presence since he had already given the mover detailed instructions in regard to the disposal of the chest.

The chest, locked but without a key, stood in one corner of the room. The melted wax remains of a candle, burned to the end of its wick, lay nearby.

The landlady shook her head. "A good way to burn the house down," she complained. "I'll have to speak to Mr. Maax. Not like him to be so careless."

The movers, burdened with the chest, paid no attention to her. The assistant growled as they started down the stairs. "Must be lined with lead. Never knew a chest so heavy before!"

"Heavy wood," his companion commented shortly, not wishing to waste his breath.

"Wonder why he's dumpin' such a good chest?" the assistant asked later as the truck approached an abandoned quarry near the edge of town.

The chief mover glanced at him slyly. "I guess I know," he said. "He bought it of Jason Kinkle. And Kinkle never told him the story on it. But he found out later I figure—and that's why he's pitchin' it."

The assistant's interest picked up. "What's the story?" he asked.

They drove into the quarry grounds and got out of the truck.

"Kinkle bought it dirt cheap at an auction," the mover explained as they lifted out the chest. "Auction of old Henry Stubberton's furniture."

The assistant's eyes widened as they started up a steep slope with the chest. "You mean the Stub-

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berton they found murdered in a. . . ."

"*In a chest!*" the mover finished for him. "*This chest!*"

Neither spoke again until they set down the chest at the edge of a steep quarry shaft.

Glancing down at the deep water which filled the bottom of the shaft, the mover wiped the sweat from his face. "A pretty sight they say he was. All doubled up and turnin' black. Seems he wasn't dead when they shut him in though. They say he must have tried to claw his way out! When they opened the chest, they found one of his fingers jammed up under the lid, near the lock! Tried to pick the lock with his fingernail, it looked like!"

The assistant shuddered. "Let's be rid of it then. It's bad luck sure!"

The mover nodded. "Take hold and shove."

They strained together and in another second the calamander chest slipped over the edge of the quarry and hurtled toward the pool of black water far below. There was one terrific splash and then it sank from sight like a stone.

"That's good riddance and another tenner for me," the mover commented.

Oddly enough however, he never collected the tenner, for after that day Mr. Ernest Maax dropped completely out of sight. He was never seen nor heard of again. The disgruntled mover, never on the best of terms with the police, shrugged off the loss of the tenner and neglected to report the disposal of the chest. And since the landlady had never learned the mover's name, nor where he intended taking the chest, her sparse information was of no help in the search.

The police concluded that Maax had gotten into some scrape, changed his name, and effected a permanent change of locale.

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Reflections of An Egyptian Princess While Being Interred

By EDITH OGUTSCH

I lie here in state, at Karnak
My body is dressed like a bride
The coffin is cheerfully painted
But for me it is dark inside.

The priests and the slaves are wailing
They place a jar at my head
The viscera drawn through my nostrils
And preserved, of the newly dead.

Provisions are put round my coffin
To lighten my arduous way
I'll linger a little while longer
The Gods please forgive my delay.

I think of the joys of childhood
The leisurely days by the Nile
The warm autumn nights in the vinyards
My father's affectionate smile.

I long for the arms of my lover
The bliss that we shared 'neath the moon
My heart cries a prayer to Isis
To let me be born again soon.

The mourners have left—I'm frightened
Supposing the priests aren't right?
Perhaps there is only the one life
And this the eternal night.

The striving, the struggling onwards
The learning, the drawing each breath
Does it end right here in this chamber
Or do we go on after death?

I lie here forgotten, at Karnak
The centuries slowly creep by
A princess of ancient Egypt
Not living, unable to die.

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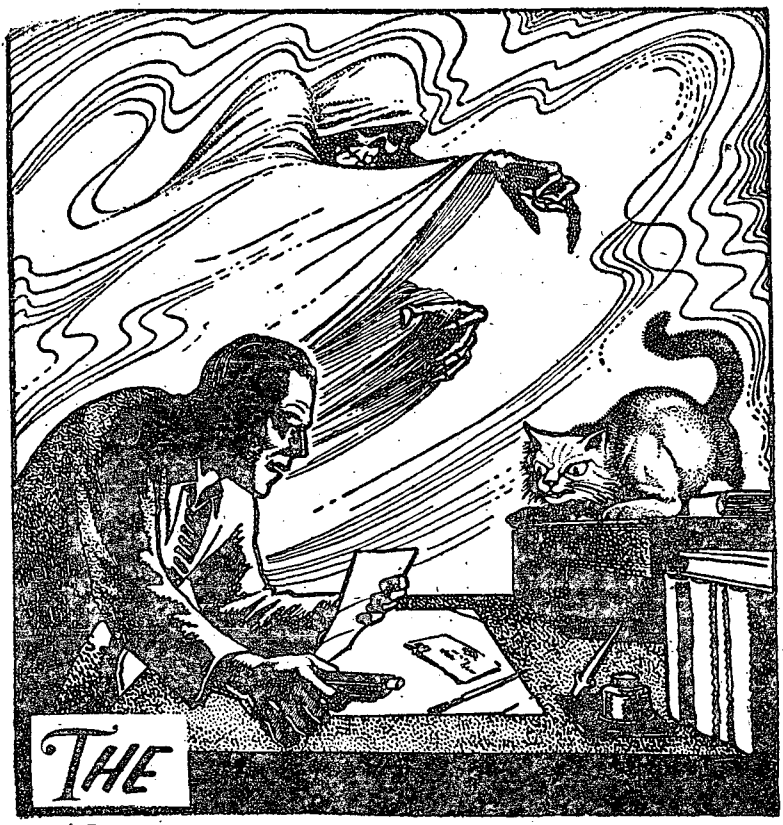
". . . all power is mine, the demon is my power."



THE STORMCLIFF PAPERS

BY W. J. SUPRENANT

I

IF I NEVER sleep again as long as I live, it will be a just retribution for keeping silent when I should have spoken; for concealing a truth that cried for admission. And I haven't slept—God knows what would happen should I close my eyes and drift

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into the black helplessness of sleep. No, I cannot sleep until I have put many comforting miles between myself and Stormcliff, and the sea.

When young Anders brought the papers to my rooms—then was the time for truth. Why did I hesitate? Was it because, after twenty-four years, I had come to believe that the nightmare of terror I had experienced as a boy of twelve was merely a bad case of imagination? None of us likes to be thought a fool. And the truth, if told, would have stamped my story as a madman's delusion.

I was fond of young Anders, as one would be fond of a playful, good-natured puppy. His elder brother Peter had gone through medical school with me. We graduated together and set up separate practices in town. Peter stuck to straight G.P., whereas I tended to branch out into the psychosomatic field. We were the closest of friends, and occasionally John Anders shared our quiet get-togethers. Only occasionally, though. I think young Anders felt that we were rather elderly and dull to suit his taste. He seemed to enjoy our company best when deep in a discussion of abnormal psychology or the metaphysical. An hour or two spent in dissecting matters supernatural would hold him spellbound, but once start a post-operative analysis of Mrs. So and So's gall bladder and John would be off like a shot. Not that he was at all ghoulish upon such subjects; he simply had a deep interest in matters of that sort. A recompense, I thought, for a wonderfully healthy mind and body: the touch of darkness that we all hold somewhere within us.

So I was pleased rather than surprised when young Anders brought the papers to my rooms.

"This should be right up your alley," he said, and tossed a sheaf of papers onto my desk. "Talk about old wives' tales! See what you make of this."

I flipped open the paper cover, noting the ancient but legible script, the startling opening sentence: *Nothing upon the earth or above the earth or beneath the earth may harm me. All power is mine. The demon is my power.*

I glanced up and met his smile. "It takes all kinds. . . ." I murmured. "Where did you find this?"

"At Stormcliff, and by happy chance. You knew that I've been remodelling the old library? It was inconvenient as it was; dark; bookshelves a mile high. Knocking out the partition between the two east windows, the workmen found an old journal walled up there. These were in it."

Stormcliff, I thought uneasily. That ancient, looming pile above the sea; young Anders had

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bought it for next to nothing because no one else would have taken it as a gift. It was too old; too large, too full of darkness and decay; but John was delighted with its brooding antiquity.

"I'll be glad to read them," I assured him. "They look as old as Stormcliff itself."

"I believe they are. From all I could discover, old Adam Widdemer, the author of this remarkable fantasy, founded Stormcliff over two hundred years ago. The papers are dated, as you see, about fifteen years after the house was built."

My curiosity aroused, I pressed him for details concerning Stormcliff and its founder, hoping—or dreading?—that he might throw light upon my own dark store of information.

"There is very little I can tell you, Gordon. Widdemer built the house in a spot that at that time must have been pretty desolate. He brought a bride from England; she was very beautiful, according to his journal. I gather that he built Stormcliff as a sort of glass tower to keep her from the rest of the world—or, to be more particular, a certain handsome young lord. She was unhappy, but managed to assist him in founding a line of Widdemers that has died out only recently. One stolid son she gave him. She died in that childbirth."

"And Widdemer?" I prompted.

Anders frowned. "No one seems to know. He disappeared, finally, without a trace. The journal ends abruptly with a rather curious reference to the papers I've brought you. I remember the words: "They think me mad. Tonight they shall be proved wrong. The record is finished. *The demon is impatient.*" Anders drew the phrase out in mock malignity. "With that, my friend, I must leave you. May your dreams be troubled tonight!" He glanced at his watch, refused my offer of a drink. "Sleep well," he said, and with a hearty, humorous laugh he closed the door behind him, leaving me with the papers that were to make me wish I have never heard of Stormcliff, or been fool enough to read beyond the first page of that infamous record.

Surely I had warning. Else, why should a certain childhood memory hover so persistently between my eyes and those yellowed pages—a memory that I had succeeded in banishing from my mind only after years of mental effort?

I am a doctor, a supposedly rational man. Delving into the unknown is, for me, merely a relaxation. Why then should my first reaction to those time faded words be a sharp irritation, and then—an unreasoning fear?

Those papers, leprous fruit of

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an abnormal mind, should have been destroyed at discovery. Twenty-odd mouldering sheets—a recorded history of the evil that came to Stormcliff, the house by the sea, and a shuddering blasphemy in this prosaic, unsuspecting world.

Yet it was blind fear that I knew when I had laid aside the last of those foul papers. I was trembling, and a nauseous churning in the pit of my stomach led me to grope for the whiskey decanter at my elbow. How long I sat there striving for reason, I do not know. I felt that everything I believed in, everything I had been taught as a Christian, was powerless against the onslaught of evil that Adam Widdemer had loosed on the night of his disappearance.

And I knew that John Anders stood in grave peril of losing his very soul.

I reached for my desk phone with shaking hands and dialled a number. A drowsy voice answered my ring.

"This is Gordon, Peter. I've got to see you. Shall I meet you there, or—"

"What's wrong?" he demanded, then "Never mind. Wait for me. I'll be there in five minutes."

I did not have long to wait. From my study window I saw him striding up the walk. I went down to let him in.

HE THREW his coat across a chair and looked hard at my face. His keen and steady stare brought back a measure of peace. I poured two whiskeys and motioned him to a chair. He sat quietly, waiting for me to begin.

"We've been friends for a good many years, Peter," I said. "I want you to hear me out, remembering that. I need your help, and I feel that you may need mine. Also, I want you to keep an open mind regarding what I am about to say."

He nodded. I knew that I could count on him. "Read this—" I said, handing him the Stormcliff papers. He took them, looked them over curiously, and read them rapidly. I studied his face while he read. Curiosity, scepticism distaste, yes—but not fear. He returned them to me when he had finished.

"What an abhorrent mind that man must have had," he said quietly.

"You see nothing in the papers to warrant belief?"

"Belief! My dear Gordon—you're an intelligent man. How can you ask? What hideous rot!"

"That is what I wanted to know," I replied. "I called you, Peter, with hardly a second thought. I've always admired your direct, caustic mind. And Peter—I have grave reason to believe in the truth of these papers."

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He did not smile, but waited.

"It's because I believe at least a part of what these papers contain that I feel your brother John is in grave danger of losing his life—and possibly more than his life." I said it bluntly, saw Peter start with shock. "I believe that unless we can persuade him to abandon Stormcliff, he will disappear one night — as Adam Widdemer disappeared."

"You mean that you actually believe old Adam was speaking from experience? Where is that page—" He ran through the papers and selected the one he wanted. He read aloud: "*I find that the Book, though all but illegible at this place . . . has given me the true key. The symbols:* (here followed a careful design within a pentagram) *have brought it up out of the sea. At first I was affrighted by its hideous mien. It is well that I could not see its visage. It strove wildly, but could not pass the barrier effected by the symbol:* (there followed a triangle holding a different design, and drawn even more painstakingly than the pentagram.)"

"I have reason to believe it," I repeated. "And for once in my life, at least, I am beginning to doubt my own sanity. I need your impartial viewpoint of this—this madness," I said, indicating the Stormcliff papers.

"You feel that John may be in danger of this 'being' Adam Widdemer called up out of the sea. Is that it?"

"That is it. That is why I'm asking you to persuade him to leave Stormcliff—before his remodelling goes too far. He may stumble onto something decidedly upleasant."

"He's read the papers, of course?" I nodded, and Peter continued: "I can understand why he would bring them to you, rather than to me. You know, Gordon, I advised him against purchasing Stormcliff. It's too old, too run down. A huge house that's left to dampness and rot for forty years. . . . well, he wouldn't listen. I can hardly agree with you that there is more to this than meets the eye; and I'll confess I'm surprised that you take any stock in Widdemer's ravings. The man must have been mad."

"Would you care to take the chance of his running across anything of the sort?" I persisted. "He's young, incautious. . . . and I'm sure there *was* something; not at all certain that there *isn't* something still."

He was silent for some moments, as if waiting for me to go on, but I couldn't—not just yet.

"I'll look into it, Gordon," he said slowly. "I have no reason to doubt your word. But to take any stock in such a thing—it's too incredible. It couldn't happen.

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Why, the world would go mad if there were such beings as Adam described let loose upon it. Don't take offense, old man, but wouldn't it be a good idea to see a specialist? You *have* been overworking lately, you know."

I had expected that, of course. "I'll do anything you say, if it will convince you. Only I hope to God we are not too late. I hope that I am wrong!"

II

I HAD been badly shaken, it is true. But as the days went drifting on into October and nothing out of the ordinary occurred, the horror of that childhood memory faded once more into oblivion. I was just a bit uneasy when young Anders stopped by to reclaim the Stormcliff papers; I felt a strange reluctance to hand them over to one so young and vital. But John was in excellent spirits and insisted that the papers belonged with the house, along with its ghosts. I inquired about the progress he was making with the remodelling of Stormcliff into a more livable dwelling. There was little more to be done, he said. He did not want to lose the original charm of the place by making too many changes. The men were nearly finished working on the lower corridor, tearing out the thick-massed stone of the east wall to make possible a large window overlooking the sea. We said good-bye, and I promised him that I would take a run out one day soon, for dinner.

It was to be sooner than I thought.

PETER called on me three days later. He came at once to the study and stood frowning, tamping the tobacco in a particularly foul-smelling relic of a pipe.

"Has it occurred to you, Gordon," he said after a pause, "how much trouble may be caused by the tampering of fools in affairs of which they would best remain in ignorance?"

It was rather an unnecessary question. We all learn that, sooner or later.

"I am referring to John," he said briefly. "Young idiot! He came for the Stormcliff papers, did he not?"

"Why, yes," I said. "He'd only loaned them to me."

"I'm sorry you returned them to him." He turned abruptly and flung himself into the chair before my desk. "I can't help feeling responsible for the kid."

"John is thirty," I reminded him.

"Yes, but he has such high-flown ideas he needs a firm hand still. Had dinner with me three nights ago. I suggested what you asked me to—about his leaving Stormcliff, at least for a while.

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I'll confess you had me a bit bothered, Gordon. He ridiculed the idea. In fact, he was highly excited about something he had found out about the place. He was coming here to get the papers then. Said he needed them. I haven't seen him since. And—I've tried."

The words ended so dryly, so quietly, I felt cold.

"He's missing then."

"His workmen haven't seen him. I've been out there. He hasn't stopped at the club, and I'll admit I'm worried. Mind you, I'm not thinking of the talk you and I had some time ago. At least, not in the same way. I still say it's utter nonsense. But I can't think what damnfool notion he might have dreamed up. . . ."

"Have you tried locating him through the usual channels?"

"I'd look a great fool, wouldn't I, should it turn out he's off on a three day jaunt?"

"But good Lord!" I burst out, appalled by the possibilities of the situation. "Whether you believe me or not, Peter—those damned papers may be the cause of John's disappearance — or worse. We've got to go out there —to Stormcliff. I'm afraid, Peter, that I know where John is—or *was*. We shall have to find the papers, and the journal. They will show us the way."

He turned to me, alert. "Why do you insist that there is truth in those beastly papers? I remember you said you had reason to believe in them. What *is* the reason?"

I HESITATED, knowing how the truth would sound to Peter. Yet, fantastic as it was, and incredible, shouldn't I have spoken out at once when John first brought the papers to me? Better to have been thought eccentric or even mad than to have this weight of guilt hanging over me now.

"I'd hoped to avoid speaking of it at all, Peter," I said at last. "It was something that happened to me when I was a boy, nearly twelve. Since then, I've made every effort to forget the horror of it as it struck me then. I had to. The nightmares. . . . well, no matter. I don't know whether you remember my grandfather. He must have been over sixty years old at that time, but he was still a remarkably active man. His favorite pastime was sailing in the bay; very few days passed that did not find him there, often as not with me along. He went out alone on this particular day. Perhaps I'd been ill, I don't remember, but I'd stayed at home. It was midsummer and the air was very close, promising a storm. Before he could get back, the storm broke. I remember its violence; I don't suppose I shall ever forget it. Gramps had the

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skiff, and I was worried about him because it was rather hard to handle in rough weather. We waited for him while it grew blacker and blacker outside.

"I remember my father going out with the men to see if they could find him; remember too that that night, for the first time in my lifetime, the lighthouse beacon failed. It was odd, you know. They didn't find grandfather. He came home—alone. It was I who heard him at the door. I thought that it was a dog, at first. . . . the whimpering. . . . God! I had nightmares for years after. I opened the door. He was on his knees, and when the support of the door gave way, he *crumpled* against me. I couldn't move. I stood there, paralyzed until someone came and led me away. Even then, I could see the blood, and the way he'd been *torn*. I could hear the things he screamed. He died during the night; no one so mangled could have lived. They said his mind was gone from the shock of his injuries, but they hadn't seen what I had. How can I describe it, the horror of it? It turned away when I opened the door, as if it had been—*interrupted at feeding*. It filled the night outside, then seemed to melt behind the rain that was sweeping through the doorway. And the *smell*. . . ."

I raised my head from my hands and met Peter's gaze. He seemed pale, but there was puzzlement behind his eyes.

"A horrible experience for a child," he said gravely, "Yet I don't see the connection between this—and Stormcliff."

"He screamed until he died," I said. "I couldn't help but hear. He'd been fond of me, did I say? Over and over he repeated to my father: "Go away from this accursed place. . . . take the boy away. . . . you are in danger. . . . keep him away from Stormcliff. . . ." until I stopped up my ears with my fists and cried myself to sleep. I knew where he'd been, you see. We'd often explored the crags beneath Stormcliff. And we'd shared a secret together, grandfather and I. . . . the entrance to Stormcliff—from the sea."

"Very well," Peter said quietly, "We shall start for Stormcliff at once. You've won."

III

STORMCLIFF crouched malignant in the dusk, brooding over the sea that had raged against its foundations for untold centuries. Gnawed by time, the cliffs were stark and jagged, sweeping away to the north to wilderness and heavy forest, away from the sea. The grounds were a tangle of underbrush and briary growth, hemmed in on all

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but the eastern side by dark massed pine and spruce. The narrow road in was all but swallowed by the crowding forest. The wind from the sea was cold and keen and I hunched deeper into my coat as I followed Peter's unfaltering lead. The jingling of keys brought me up against an unsheltered door, like a mouth closed grimly upon the secrets that lay within. I shivered involuntarily as it swung open at the touch of Peter's hand. All was still, suddenly, when the door had closed behind us. . . . too still, I thought uneasily.

In spite of the clamour of the sea, read the papers, *the vaults of Stormcliff are as silent as the tomb. . . .*

"And as cold as a tomb," Peter muttered. I knew that he too recalled the passage.

In the dim twilight, the cavernous rooms stretched out on either side of us down the length of a shadow hung corridor. From its eastern end the dying light of day filtered in through a ragged opening: the unfinished window, so boarded as to do little to dispel the gloom.

"We want the library," Peter said, too loudly. I listened to the echoes of his voice careening off into the darkness, *awakening what guardian of the night?* The thought came unbidden. I could not shake myself free of it. At that moment, I wanted nothing so much as the security of my own four walls. But I plodded on behind Peter.

Stormcliff, since young Anders' purchase of it, had been beautifully kept. The satiny gleam of panelling, the wine-like glow of polished floors attested to the conscientious care of his housekeeper. I reflected, too, that for reasons of her own she would not stay in the house after dark, save when John needed her help with one of his infrequent dinner parties. The old legends, handed down and down by word of mouth — who knows what truth they contain?

PETER went directly to the windows and drew the heavy curtains tightly closed, then touched a wall switch. The light, flooding over the darkness of the room, helped to calm my unease. Surely, in an age such as this, there could be no such bestiality as was gloated over in that damp-rotted handful of papers? I joined Peter before the empty grate. He stood surveying the room quickly, efficiently.

"Suppose you try the desk drawers, Gordon. I'll have a look round the rest of the room. We'll have to find those papers, or I suppose we'll be running on blind chance."

I searched the desk from top to bottom, even tapping and prying for a possible hidden section.

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Except for the faint sounds Peter made riffling through the pages of books, searching through cabinets, there was no other sound. Once, I went to the window and looked out over the sea. It was crashing and foaming against the crags below, driven to fury by the storm blowing out of the north, yet only two hundred feet above it, I could hear no sound of that mighty violence. The dreadful quiet of the place was like a weight upon me. I found myself keeping in tune with that silence, making no noise at all as I searched. Peter, too, was moving as noiselessly as a cat. He caught my glance and laughed, nervously.

"Gets you, rather!"

I agreed.

There was nothing to be found. We both admitted failure.

"Pour us a drink from that cabinet, Gordon," Peter said. "I'll get the makings of a fire for the grate. At least we shall be comfortable while we plan our next move."

A little later, seated before a crackling fire, Peter said: "It's possible, of course, that John has the papers with him, wherever he may be. In that case, what do you suggest?"

"That's fairly obvious, isn't it? Find out what it was that excited his interest, and act accordingly."

"But it could have been almost anything from cellar to garret. I've been over all of it. Still, we can go over it again. You might spot something I overlooked." He paused a moment. "I want you to understand that I can't believe in this thing, as far as those papers are concerned. What you experienced, Gordon —how can you be certain there's any connection?" He looked at me. His face was far more haggard than his words would warrant. "Let's stick to sanity. He's probably discovered some hidden stair and got himself locked in. Teach him a good lesson, I suppose, but it's rather hard on us, meanwhile."

"Maybe," I said. I hoped I was wrong. *I've got to be,* I thought, as I followed him from the room, *for Peter's sake, as well as John's—and my own.*

But there was no reassurance in the clustering shadows of the stairwell, or the dampness of the upper halls, nor in the faint, mold-bourne odor that emanated from the old walls.

Together, we went over the old house from garret to cellar, walking in semi-darkness part of the time, constantly aware of the silence and gloom that surged forward as if to meet our advance upon each room, each corridor. There was no trace of young Anders; no trace of a struggle; no trace of any discovery that he might have made. . . . . until we paused for a moment near the

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ragged masonry of the lower corridor's east wall. Even then, in my disturbed state, I should not have connected the torn wall with young Anders' discovery, had it not been for an almost tangible emanation of cold at that spot. It was thick, suddenly, and pressing. It was evil with such a force of malignancy that I struggled backward, away from the touch of it. I suppose I must have gone white, because Peter looked at me sharply before he said: "What is it—are you ill?"

"It's that cold—the same as when I—"

"Only a draught. The wind from the sea is like a knife. I think we'd best go home, Gordon. We can do little in this wretched darkness. John will probably show up in the morning, fresh from some jaunt or other. If not, well—we'll come back by daylight."

I COULD not go. I could not tear from my mind the thought that only a moment before but the flimsiest bit of boarding had separated the two of us from a hideousness impossible to bear. I was as sure of it, as certain, as if I had seen as well as felt the presence that had stood somewhere near, in darkness, in silence. As noiselessly as it had come, it had gone, carrying with it its burden of icy horror.

I have always assumed that I am neither more nor less courageous than most men, but at that moment my mouth went dry. I laid my hands on the boarding and said: "This is it, of course," in so unnatural a voice that it did not sound like mine at all. "Help me tear this loose, Peter."

Peter, of course, had seen or heard nothing to cause alarm. He had not felt the seeping, icy cold as I had. But he must have known from my voice or my expression that something was wrong. He wrenched at one end of the temporary boarding; the section that I had in my hands fell loosely away at once. It had simply been propped into place securely enough to hold it against the wind. The wall was very thick at this point. Before us gaped the yawning opening that John had intended for a window. It looked out upon fast falling darkness and the sea that writhed far below. On the right of us, perhaps three feet in between the solid stone of the walls, was set a narrow, rough plank door. It looked inward upon blackness, still swaying slightly from the passage of—what dreadful listener? I drew back, feeling sick with apprehension. I was a child of twelve again, enmeshed in nightmare, terrified of surrendering myself into those waiting, hungry arms.

Beside me, Peter fumbled in his pocket and brought out a

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flashlight. The narrow beam spilled sickly light down a damply glistening stone stair, very narrow, hollowed in the rock of the massive wall. Far down they went, into absolute blackness. Peter started forward, and though everything in me cried out against it, I followed, ashamed of my terror.

"It smells like the source of all foulness in here," Peter said quietly, in disgust. It was an odor that was all too reminiscent to me. I told Peter so, but he had seen something that excited him. He bent forward. "Here's a footprint, Gordon. It looks like you were right. Look here. . . ." He focussed the light on the step below him and I stretched around him, trying to see.

"It's a footprint, all right," I said, "but look at the shape of it—no human foot ever. . . ." The light had lifted for just a second, attracting my attention to a movement far below, as if a grayness had paused, and turned. Peter's voice rumbled on in the narrow, stone-bound darkness. I grasped his arm and tried to pull him backward, up the stair.

"Hurry," I gasped, "we've got to get out of here."

But Peter paused long enough to flash the light below, to see the reason for my panic. I don't know what he saw, but he turned and stumbled after me, dropping the flashlight and clawing at my legs in his haste. At that same moment, the darkness was pierced by the most dreadful volume of sound, rising so loud and shrill I thought my eardrums would burst. It was like laughter, but no human laughter ever held such a burden of madness. Peter was gasping behind me when I flung myself upon the door and slammed it to, bolting it behind us with fingers that had suddenly gone stiff with nervelessness. At once the door was struck a thunderous blow that echoed and re-echoed hollowly through the vast corridor. Peter had sagged limply against one wall. His eyes were sick with shock and a fine perspiration filmed his white face. He was sobbing for breath. Oddly, at that moment it was I who was calm. I took his arm and led him into the library, against his protestations.

"Oh, God, Gordon—" he whispered, "why didn't you tell me?"

I let that go unanswered. I had told, to the best of my ability, even if a bit late. I listened carefully for any sound of pursuit. There was none, and I did not think that we would be troubled in the stark brightness of the library. I went to a cabinet and poured straight whiskey for both of us. It helped bring Peter to himself, though he shuddered at intervals. It would be a long time before he would forget. We

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did not talk. It would have been almost impossible to discuss such matters in the terrible silence of Stormcliff. Instead, we went out and locked the door behind us and drove away from the troubled darkness, to my rooms.

IV

THAT we must go back—and soon—was clear to both of us. John was somewhere in the black depths of that evil place. Whether dead or alive, we could not know, but there was little hope for him in my mind.

"There is just a chance," Peter said, "if part of the story is true—and God knows I don't doubt it now—then perhaps the rest was true, also. John may have been able to protect himself. He had the symbols with him; I think we can be sure of that. And the triangle was supposed to have had some power over the monster."

"We'll need help," I said.

"*If* we can get it," Peter amended. "Can you think how it would sound if we take this story to—say—the police? You had trouble convincing me, Gordon. Likely as not, they'd just shake their heads over the pity of it all. . . . no; they'd think we were mad."

"We do have some standing in town," I argued. Peter only smiled very tiredly. "You'll admit we've acquired, quite honestly, a reputation for our share, at least, of rationality. There must be someone, somewhere, willing to lend a hand."

"Any number, willing to go along with a practical joke. Don't you see that's the only possible way it would appear to them?"

I thought, despairing, of young Anders.

"Then we'll have to fight it out, just the two of us. You have a gun, I suppose?"

Peter stopped pacing long enough to regard me fixedly.

"Do you think an ordinary weapon will be of any use against something as old and evil as that? I doubt it, Gordon. It must have been living there under Stormcliff and in the bay, for hundreds of years. Think of the legends you've heard—sea-serpents, horrors of the deep," he came to stand facing me, his eyes unnaturally dark with excitement. "Think of the sheep, the cattle that have been killed. It was blamed on dogs, poison, anything but what it very well might have been. How often did they find killer dogs?" His voice dropped, then. "I haven't mentioned the disappearances that have taken place over a period of years. The devilish part of it is, all this can be explained quite readily, and sanely. Doesn't it stand to reason that someone, in

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all this time, has tried to kill this horror? That any variety of weapons must have been used against it, all to no avail?"

"We've got to try," I said. "If John is down there, and alive, it's obvious he's been unable to escape. He needs help."

"It's been three days now. I need a little time to think," Peter said. I knew he was wretched, but my mind was devoid of any really practical suggestion. There was one help remaining.

"Exorcism has been tried before, with surprising results," I said. "We could hunt up a priest."

Peter considered it only briefly. "If it were simply a matter of a haunted house, I'd agree. Spirits —I can see their yielding to a stronger power. But this thing, Gordon, is no spirit. It has weight—substance. It left that footprint, remember? And that was no tenuous wisp of ectoplasm that crashed against that door." He shook his head almost violently. "Dear God I can still hear it—!"

"And I," I said dryly, "would rather be shot dead than give the thing a chance to feed on my bones. But there's no other way. We've got to get out there and do what we can, instead of pacing this room discussing it."

"If it could be trapped in some way—" Peter said slowly. "That's it. We must trap it somehow, permanently."

"Dynamite?" I suggested.

"It might work, if we could get it bottled up somehow, cornered."

"Do *you* want to corner it?" I asked incredulously. "Remember, it was not so long ago it had us cornered, almost; it was none too pleasant an experience."

"If there are fissures, or pits in the thing's lair—do you know, Gordon?" He grasped my shoulder impatiently. "You did say you knew of an entrance to Stormcliff, from the sea. You must remember."

I THOUGHT of a small boy enthusiastically exploring the caverns and passages beneath Stormcliff, a youngster with no inkling of the horror that dwelt therein. . . .

"Yes," I said at last, "There were fissures, cracks in the stone where the sea must have boiled in at high tide; there were barnacles and things, shells. . . . I never really discovered the stair, though."

"Were there any deep pits?" Peter asked as if exasperated.

"I don't really. . . . wait a minute! Yes, there was; one—a deep, black thing. I threw a stone into it, once. I never heard it strike bottom. There was no sound, not even a splash."

Peter's eyes were alive with

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excitement. "That's it. That's what we need!"

"You mean to persuade it to lower itself in?" I asked, but then I was a little giddy with nervousness.

"It feeds on flesh — and blood," Peter said. The pit would mean nothing to it. It's never before been hampered by stone or water, that's certain. If we slaughter a sheep, it may lure it."

"Then there's no need of dynamite, if you can get it into that pit," I said confidently. "It could never get out."

"You didn't see it coming up the stairs," Peter said, shuddering at the memory. "It wasn't walking. . . . and its speed was incredible."

"Not walking? It left footprints on the stair."

"Just thank your God," Peter said fervently, "that you failed to see it—as I did. And now—besides a freshly slaughtered sheep, we'll need some dependable light, strong rope, a few sticks of dynamite — take your gun along if you like, but do be careful."

"You forgot to mention the most important thing of all," I said as I followed him from the room, in search of the items Peter required.

"What was that?"

"A strong faith in God, who made *it* as well as us."

V

I HAD rummaged around in my laboratory-workshop until I finally located a good length of strong rope and a gasoline lantern, as well as a powerful flashlight, items that I sometimes used on fishing trips, when Peter suggested that he get in touch with old McPherson. I saw his object, but I was rather doubtful. The old man operated a boating club for well-to-do summer visitors.

"We can't possibly use the stairs," Peter explained "It would only defeat our purpose. They're so narrow we'd stand a good chance of being trapped ourselves. There's a motor launch we can use, if you can remember the entrance from the bay."

I agreed, then. I remembered the entrance well enough. And though the wind was still blowing up dirty weather, I preferred to take my chances from the sea entrance, rather than bottled up again on that perilous stair.

"I'll phone, then, and have it made ready," Peter said, "Meantime, you'll have to get hold of a good sized sheep. Truss it. We'll want to keep it alive until we are ready for it. I'll get the dynamite, myself. And get back here as quickly as you can. I'll call you when I'm ready. You can meet me at the old pier—that way we'll both save time."

Then he was off, leaving me to

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my thoughts and the few odd jobs delegated to me.

I was at the pier some time before Peter arrived. The bound and bewildered sheep lay blatting at my feet. I pitied the creature, and was thankful that it would not know or fully understand the reason for its sacrifice. I suppose I rather pitied myself too during the length of that lonely vigil. It had turned much colder and the wind from the sea was like a knife. There was very little light, but the pilings beneath the pier groaned with the force of the wind and I could see the rising swells of the breakers boiling and sucking beneath my feet. It was a cold, bitter night, but the most bitter part of all lay just ahead. If young Anders was still alive, if he had not broken against what seemed to me an insuperable horror, then it would be a night well spent on my part. Yet in the back of my mind doubt nagged. Three days of it—could any mind withstand it?

PETER arrived in a cutter instead of the launch. Much better, I thought, in these heavy seas. Old McPherson stood crouched over the tiller. I could hear him grumbling to himself as Peter helped me aboard with our various needs. "He seems to have an idea of our mission," Peter said, low, "but we'll get no help from him. He's sworn he'll not set foot on the rocks beneath Stormcliff. I had trouble enough getting his consent to take us at all."

"I'll not blame him for that," I said. "Did you manage the dynamite?"

Peter motioned to a small box beside him. "All set. The sticks are tempered for our immediate use." He paused a moment as if wrestling with some troubled thought before he added, "Are you sure you want to go through with it, Gordon? It's a great deal to ask—"

"I'm sure," I said, and meant it. I turned away to inspect, with some curiosity, the box containing the dynamite. It seemed to be filled with sawdust; precautionary, I supposed. Peter had worked on construction jobs many a summer before we graduated. I put my faith in his ability to handle that end of the operation. Certainly I did not know the first thing about it.

There was little talk between us during the half hour it took before the cliffs beneath Stormcliff loomed blackly out of the night. I know Peter was as absorbed in his dark thoughts as I was in my own. As soon as McPherson cut the power, we prepared to lower the dinghy over the side. When we were afloat in that all too fragile shell, then I prayed in earnest. It would take more than the mem-

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ory of a certain peculiarly shaped cleft in the rock to keep us from mangling ourselves on the dangerous crags. Just as I said to Peter, "We'll have to chance a light—" the sound of old McPherson's voice reached us. "May God be wi' ye," he called, a bit belatedly. I could picture him, all ready to send the cutter speeding away from there at the first sign of danger from the dweller beneath Stormcliff.

After what seemed an eternity of time spent in wind, wet and darkness, we beached the dinghy on a familiar, sandy stretch of cove out of reach of the clamoring breakers and gathered our paraphernalia. I was cold as I had never been before, and I remember touching the sagging weight of the revolver in my jacket pocket. If it came to my choice of exits, this one was infinitely preferable to me.

I led the way toward the cleft, an intensified darkness in the gloom of the night. In a better light it would look like the standing figure of a woman, brooding, head bowed. That was how it had impressed me, long ago. We approached it, leaving the sandy floor of the cove for the tumbled mass of boulders on our right, picking our way with care because of the sensitive dynamite. A fall while carrying that innocent looking burden might end our troubles sooner than expected. The rocks were slippery from the stinging salt spray, and though the sheep which I had slung upon my back was quiet enough, every little while it made sudden, frantic movements with its hoofs, throwing me clumsily off-balance. It was a relief to leave the creature at the mouth of the cavern while we set about our business of grim discovery.

The cleft narrowed considerably after we had progressed perhaps twenty feet within. The floor was broken by a jagged, deep fissure in which sea water hissed and flowed, in and out, noisily. We entered the cavern then and Peter swept the beam of his flashlight in an arc before us. There was nothing to be seen except a tumbled mass of boulders to our left. He dropped to one knee and adjusted the gasoline lantern, then struck a match. In a moment the entire cavern leaped into focus. To my eyes, accustomed to the darkness, the light was brilliant, momentarily blinding. I found that I had been holding my breath, but there was no sound, no sudden rush of horror approaching. The cavern was exceptionally still, except for the muted booming of the wind past the mouth of the cleft.

"The pit—" Peter said quietly, "where is it?"

I led the way beyond the high massed boulders on our left.

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It was there, as I remembered it; a yawning gulf perhaps eight feet across but unimaginably deep.

Peter set to work at once with what he had to do, after first considering intently the pit, the rocks and, apparently, the formation of the cleft wall. He nodded as if satisfied, then busied himself with detonator and fuses. His hands were steady and sure. I marvelled at his calm, feeling myself that all the demons of night were fast upon my heels.

"Bring the sheep," Peter said. "We'll make as ready as we can, now."

I turned away and started toward the entrance, then paused. An almost imperceptible vibration touched upon my nerves—I suppose I was tautly strung at that moment—and at the same time I heard, faintly, what sounded like the tremendous slamming of a door. Then I laughed at myself. No door in Stormcliff, no matter how loudly slammed, could be heard at the depth of this cavern. I went on and found the sheep where I had left it, and carried it back to Peter. He had nearly finished his work. The fuses were just long enough to extend out of sight on the far side of the pile of boulders. It would be but a matter of seconds, Peter said, between ignition and explosion. I hoped he hadn't cut it too fine. . . .

As soon as he had finished to his satisfaction, he took the coil of rope and rigged up a sling for the sheep. "This is your end of it," he explained. "At the first sign of—anything, you'll have to sever an artery in this poor beast's neck; let the blood fall around the mouth of the pit on this side—it's the only practical approach—and then lower it in. It should hang about ten feet down, perhaps a little more. And then start running—fast."

I considered this, not without qualms; but if Peter could tinker around with those short fuses—well. The only thing I could do now was to close my mind to any possible goings-on while I led the sheep to a slow but painless death. From now on, anything might happen—and probably would. We had been fortunate in being uninterrupted up to this point.

I think that neither of us entertained much hope of finding young Anders alive, but after Peter had moved the lantern so the boulders around the pit were thrown into deeper shadow, we moved by tacit consent toward the rear of the cavern. Our flashlights picked out a wide, natural opening leading into still another rock-bound room, larger than the first and smelling rankly

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of death and decay. I felt the flesh creep along my bones, but when my eyes had fully estimated the contents of the cavern, I turned away, sickened. Peter's exclamation: "The dining room, no less!" was apt. There was a vast and tangled mass of bones heaped carelessly along one wall. A lot of them were human bones. There were the partially gnawed carcasses of dogs, sheep, even a heifer whose underside was completely eaten away. The fresher bones, with shreds of flesh still clinging to them, had been cracked and sucked free of marrow. I turned back toward the opening for a breath of fresh air, but Peter's hand on my arm stopped me in my tracks. His head was cocked in a listening attitude. His face was as pale as I knew my own must be. Faintly, but coming closer, I heard a peculiar shuffling sound interspersed with small clicking scrapings, such as nails might make against stone. I felt every nerve in my body tauten.

Hastily, Peter ran the beam of his flashlight completely around the cavern. Then I saw what we had missed before: the inert figure of young Anders propped brokenly near the end of the hill of bones. And beside him, perhaps three feet distant, the narrow, black opening through which the stairs ascended. I watched, fascinated, awaiting the appearance of—what I knew must come.

That moment of unwitting immobility was broken when Peter leaped past me toward young Anders. I hurried after him, making a hideous clatter among the ancient bones. We did not wait to find out if John was alive or dead, or whether the perambulating horror drawing steadily nearer had been attracted by the sounds we made. Between us we supported young Anders' limp form and hurried from the cavern toward the blessed, black night and the muted booming of the sea. I noticed with rising hope that John Anders' flesh, though cold, was not clammy as in one dead. I noticed, too, that he held gripped in his left hand the paper bearing the symbol of the triangle. Whether that had saved him, I hoped to find out.

We carried him to the sandy cove and eased him into the dinghy. I considered taking the symbol back to the cavern with us, if indeed it offered protection, but we were conscious as John was not. We had at least a fighting chance. Then too, the paper was held in so convulsive a grip that I doubted if we could loosen it. Peter agreed that it should be left where it was.

The trip back to the cavern was the hardest journey I shall ever make. I know well that fear is the most basic of instincts. The

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threshold will vary with the individual, as well as being dependent upon individual reaction to varied stimuli. But one thing I think we have in common: a fear that touches the spiritual is the most subtle, insidious of all. That this was no mere bodily fear we were both agreed, though we did not discuss it at all. I know that Peter was as taut as a fiddle string. I was cold, gripped at intervals by a spasmodic trembling that was uncontrollable. But there was no question of leaving the job unfinished. Not only for our own sakes had we that to do. . . .

VI

THE cavern was starkly empty except for the tethered sheep standing forlornly in the garish light of the gasoline lantern. It was empty, but not devoid of sound. From the farther cavern came the sounds of a furious activity, a crashing of what I knew must be disjointed bones hurled with appalling strength against the silent walls of stone. We did not hesitate. Peter went at once to the pile of boulders and disappeared from my view. The carnage went on unabated, and I hurried toward the sheep. Swiftly my hands sought the great artery in the animal's neck; a twist of the scalpel-sharp little blade in my hand did the rest, but at once the bewildered beast set up such a frenzied bawling that I froze momentarily with dread. The innocent blood went spurting over my shoe tops, staining the lip of the pit with a glistening crimson film. And immediately with the bawling of the sheep, all sound from the inner cavern ceased. I couldn't look behind, though every instinct cried out for me to do so. I grasped for the rope, slippery now with blood, and nudged the staggering sheep. The rope sped through my hands, strained hard against the sudden checked weight, then caught and held fast to a restraining boulder.

I turned then, and looked into the bloated face of horror.

Not ten feet behind me it stood; gray, misshapen, blocking my path to freedom. Slitted eyes, pupilled like a cat's, looked down on me from an uncomfortable height. It was hideous from sole to crown, with its great splayed feet taloned like its hands, the sinews and knotted muscles of its long arms running powerfully into the broad drum of its chest, and over all its body covered with a bristle-like hair that glinted like gray metal in the light. But its eyes were the worst of all: long and slanted in a putty-textured face, and flickering with a feral light behind those longitudinal pupils; cold,

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deadly. It was not a human intelligence that looked at me.

I dared not make a sudden move. I knew too well the strength of those sinewy hands, their rending power. Slowly, with infinite care, my hand edged closer to my sagging pocket. The creature had not moved, nor taken its eyes from me. My hand found the pocket opening, touched the cold metal of my revolver, just as the monster lifted its head, animal-like, and sniffed the air. It looked toward the pit and I saw its mouth open, stretch, revealing a shallow cavity, terribly equipped with incurving fangs. It sniffed once again, then turned toward me with purpose. I lifted my gun and put four bullets in that massive chest before an arm lashed out and sent me sprawling twenty feet away. I lay still, numb. The bullets made a neat row in the center of its chest, but the monster, after one outraged, savage bellow, merely stood for a moment looking down at their point of entry. It had not even staggered. I closed my eyes, convinced that it was the end for me; my skull felt as if it had been irreparably cracked, but I was still numb from the force of that mighty blow. When my vision cleared I saw the beast crouched at the rim of the pit. I held my breath. The blood scent had been stronger than its rage toward me. Quietly, I flexed my muscles, got my feet under me and inched my way up the wall. The dizziness passed after a moment, and I waited. Like a dog, the monster had lapped up the blood spilled over the edge of the pit, and now was attracted by the sheep hanging out of reach, still warm and odorous. If it had intelligence enough to use the rope to pull the carcass out of the pit— But no. It vanished quickly, silently over the edge and out of sight.

"Now, Peter—" I said as steadily as I could, and moved toward the cleft in the wall. Peter was right behind me. Together, we ran out of that place of nightmare, stumbling over the rocks toward the cove. Even before we had reached it, the cleft was illumined by a wild red glow, and a stunning force hurled me flat on the rocky shore. I thought I heard again that terrible volume of sound emitted by the monster on the stairs, but I was not sure. I was on my feet in an instant and making for the dinghy.

Not until old McPherson was helping us aboard the cutter did I feel free of pursuing horror. Peter was busy with John. I supposed his face would never be entirely free of the white, drawn look that was etched upon it now. I went to help him. Young Anders was alive. It did not take too long to bring him around,

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but I knew as soon as he opened his eyes what sorrow my friend must bear. John would never recognize us again. He would smile, as a small child smiles, but he would not speak and he would not *know* . . . anything. But perhaps it is as well.

IF IT all went for nothing—there must be a reason, somewhere, beyond my futile grasp. I think of it; my brain won't let me rest. Peter is well out of it, I hope. He is somewhere in the midwest, making a home for the shell that was once his brother. I have not written to tell him of the thing that prowls about my house of nights. I try to believe that it is not necessary to tell him, that it is all imagination; but last night the basement door was tried, and it rang from a thunderous blow.

No, I have not slept.

I know what will happen should I close my eyes and drift into the black helplessness of sleep. . . .

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION of Weird Tales, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1953.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.
Editor, D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.
Managing editor, None.
Business manager, William, J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.)

Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.
William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

W. J. DELANEY, President.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1953.
(Seal)

WILLIAM G. ELLIOTT, Notary Public.

State of New York, No. 03-6174500. Qualified in Bronx County, Certf. filed with Bronx & N. Y. Co. Clks., County Clerks and Registers. My commission expires March 30, 1954.

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(Continued from second cover)

most finished, but my big one is a historical novel PAGAN which promises to be worth quite a bit of work. My Weird tales come in a flash and are a pleasure to write. I'm glad you like them.

Suzanne Pickett
Marvel, Alabama

A Virgil Finlay Portfolio

MANY times we have been asked if there is no Virgil Finlay portfolio of drawings. Now there is one, and very lovely it is. It contains fifteen black-and-white illustrations by this talented and popular artist—his own selection of his favorite drawings—and is printed on 80-pound vellum paper with a 2-color leather finish cardboard cover, and can be obtained at a price of $2.00 from:

The Nova Press, Box 2019
Philadelphia 3, Pa.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York 20, N. Y.

I should like to commend your magazine. Although I'm a scf fan myself, the weird, amazing, fantastic, out-of-this-world story hits me where I live.

The difference between scf and fantasy . . .? Well, to me hobgoblins and black magic, ghosts and zombies are, essentially, earth-born, while much of the science fiction deals with peoples and events which are not earthbound. Of course some of it deals with 3300 AD or so, but the future is simply the next generation, and what's weird about that?

N. L. Davis
San Francisco, Calif.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York 20, N. Y.

My hearty congratulations on having gone digest size, this certainly adds appreciably to the beauty of your magazine, I was never one to sneer at pulp mags merely because they were pulps but untrimmed, edges were far from a virtue. I especially like that the back of the book isn't taken up with advertisements.

*Recent issues lead me to hope that WT is about to emerge into a new renaissance of something approaching its old time brillance. Manly Wade Wellman and Clark Ashton Smith superbly demonstrate that experience plays a big part in the writing of a "weird" tale. Both have been writing over 20 years and have lost none of their skill in creating a mood of foreboding and terror. Therein lies the salvation of WT . . . . . the use of many of the "masters" who helped to build it into the legend it is today, I'm speaking of course of authors such as Edmond Hamilton, Seabury Quinn, August Derleth, Robert Bloch, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, David H. Keller, etc. ... if contributions could be secured from all of these once more my joy would know no bounds**

Paul Mittelbuscher
Sweet Springs, Mo.

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* A goodly number of these are represented in this and future issues. Editor, WEIRD TALES.

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The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York 20, N. Y.

In response to reading a letter recently published in the Eyrie on the subject of H. P. Lovecraft's stories, I would like to make a few comments in defense of this author and his style of writing. In the first place, I have read Lovecraft stories for long enough to have acquired something of the right attitude of mind to fully digest them. It is possible that I am strongly prejudiced in favor of Lovecraft, as indeed I have derived great satisfaction from the solidness of his works, but I am not so unreasonable as to assume that Lovecraft has no faults. Indeed, an important note is the fact that the greater the writer the more conspicuous are his literary faults. There always will be a certain amount of perfectly logical dissention against any man who, in the field of art or literature or any sphere of human effort, acquires a place of unusual distinction. This does not mean that there is anything fundamentally wrong with their efforts, but simply that some people just find it more difficult to appreciate them than others.

As regards so called imitators, well,—who hasn't tried to imitate someone they admired and from whom they derived inspiration in art or literature? It is just an attempt to prevent a celebrated tradition, creed, idea or method from becoming extinct after its inventor's death.

For those who carry on this tradition I say, good luck, but don't forget your own personal ideas and capabilities either.

E. C. Lambert
London, England

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WITH the extra crowded condition of the newsstands these days, we often hear the sad plaint that our readers can't find a copy of WEIRD TALES. The one sure way to get your magazine regularly is to subscribe and let the postman bring along the ghosts and goblins in his mailbag. And with so many people interested in spine-chilling literature why not a Christmas gift of a subscription to the outstanding exponent of it—WEIRD TALES? Just fill in the coupon below:

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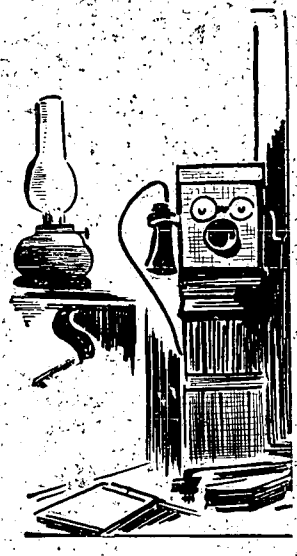
"Ghosts, did you say . . . or goblins . . . or creaking floor boards or rattling windows?"



They're all there in

WEIRD TALES

The one magazine that is full of chills, thrills and fantastic doin's.

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